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FROM  
ABRAHAM TO DAVID

THE STORY OF  
THEIR COUNTRY AND TIMES

BY  
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*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR*

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## P R E F A C E

THE Author has sought in this little work to connect some of the most recent discoveries with the Old Testament characters. He is firmly convinced that the more the Lands of the Bible and the customs of the East are studied and understood, the fuller will be the light that is thrown on the brief statements in the Bible, and the more those statements will be found to be accurate to the last degree. This book is written principally for the young, and therefore a simple unpretending account is given. If it should prove to be of any assistance to them, the object of the Author will be accomplished.

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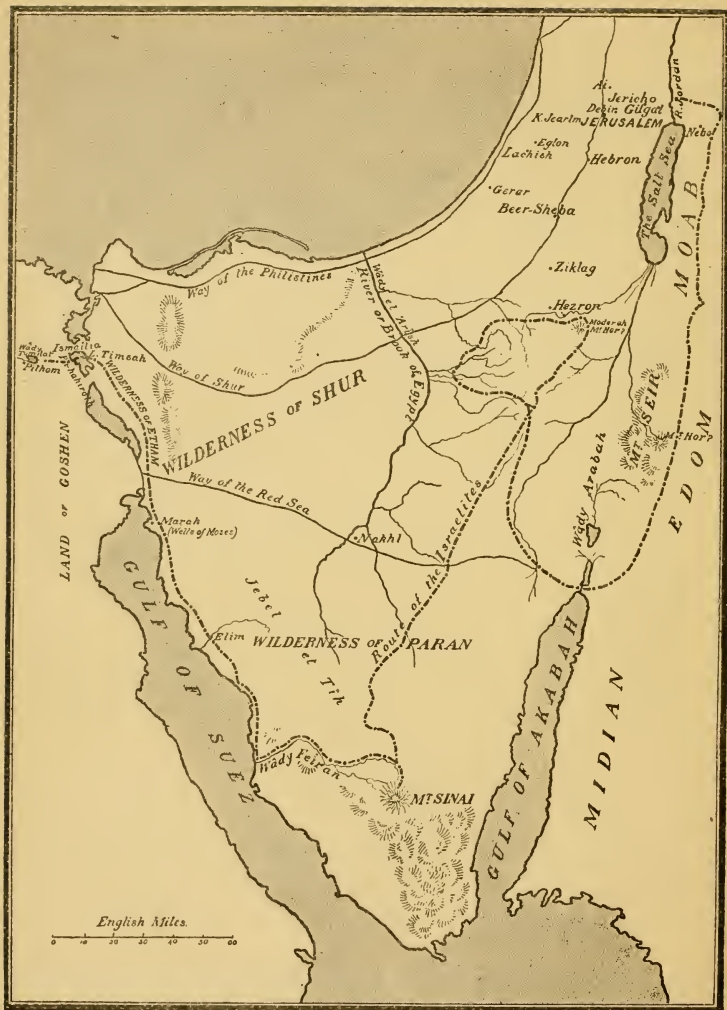
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## CHAPTER I

### THE CALL AND LIFE OF ABRAM

GENESIS xii.-xviii.

Biographical Character of Old Testament Narrative—Figures of Speech among Eastern Nations—Abram—His Emigration and Journey—Eastern Travelling—Arabs to-day—Abram in Egypt—The Battle of the Kings—The Promise to Abram.

**D**ID it ever occur to you when reading the Old Testament that the books are chiefly biographical?—a series of word-pictures of the lives of men, some great, some good, many bad. It gives terse accounts of nations, shows their origin, rise, and fall, and all this ‘was written for our learning.’ Do you really feel that all these accounts are true? You who know the history of Rome and Greece, and are familiar with the story of Romulus and Remus, of Cæsar, of Antony, Trajan, blind old Belisarius, and a host of others. Your hearts beat as you realise the struggles, the combats, the whole life of these heroes. You study the lives of Leonidas, of Socrates, of Xenophon, and you believe what you read. You take up ‘the father of history,’ and you know that Herodotus, full of interest as his pages are, is now found to be more truthful than at one time he was thought to be. Yet there were warriors as brave, heroes as daring, poets as fine, as any that those Greeks or Romans tell of; and Old Testament stories are *true*. The men and boys written about were

once living flesh and blood, and had feelings, passions, and hopes, just as we have now.

‘They climbed the steep ascent of heaven  
Through peril, toil, and pain’

just as we moderns do.

One point in the Bible we must not overlook—namely, that it has a double meaning, for besides historical teaching, it also conveys spiritual instruction; it was written by the direct will and inspiration of Almighty God, that all men might see how He works, and what He is—not an abstraction, but a living, loving Father, ‘the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.’

Another point of some importance: we Englishmen pride ourselves on speaking ‘straight.’ We say, ‘our word is our bond.’ We hear with pride that an *Arab* will say, or swear, by the ‘word of an Englishman.’ We think we express our meaning in as few words as possible, and that like those old Norsemen from whom we come, man or boy, an Englishman cannot tell a lie! But Easterns—well, they are full of poetry, full of imagination, they envelop their thoughts in clouds of metaphor, they are full of eloquence, they love intrigue, trick, or deceit. Their imagery requires to be studied or we fail to understand it, and hence it is that so many, in reading the Old Testament, fail to grasp the true meaning. An Englishman will say his sister, or cousin, or some one more beloved, is ‘lovely,’ ‘beautiful,’ ‘charming.’ An Eastern will say, ‘she is like a palm tree for stateliness, her eyes like those of the gazelle for beauty, and her voice like the song of the nightingale.’ Think of this great difference; it comes out in all the events of everyday life. But as we go on we shall see that Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Gideon, David, and a host of others, though living

in a different land and under different conditions of society, were yet real boys and men, flesh and blood like ourselves; and as we read of their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, their brave struggles to do the right, we shall see the reflection of our own lives, and thank God, and take courage, and press on in the fight. They lived their life, they fought a good fight,

‘Who follows in their train?’

Following our biographical plan, the first life given with detail is that of Abram. He is living with his father, Terah, in ‘Ur of the Chaldees,’ or, as the New Testament puts it, ‘in Mesopotamia,’ ‘the land between the rivers.’ He and his father migrated from their first home at the direct command of God. He was to go to a new land. They halted at a half-way place, ‘Haran.’ Why he was ordered to go we can perhaps see from inscriptions; for political and religious power was being concentrated in ‘Ur.’ Inscribed bricks which have been found show us that ‘Ur of the Chaldees’ was low down near the Persian Gulf. The religion of its people was worship of the moon. A gem now in the British Museum represents the moon-god on a throne, with priests worshipping, and many other inscriptions show that temple-building was flourishing, and that moon-worship was increasing. Probably the simple life of Abram’s father and himself would be in danger, or no longer possible, if they were to remain so near the seat of this great revival of moon-worship, so this family were to emigrate. They go to ‘Haran’ (this word means ‘road’); it was the frontier town of Babylonia, commanding both the roads and the fords of the Euphrates. It was a well-known road. Settled and warlike kingdoms first arose between the

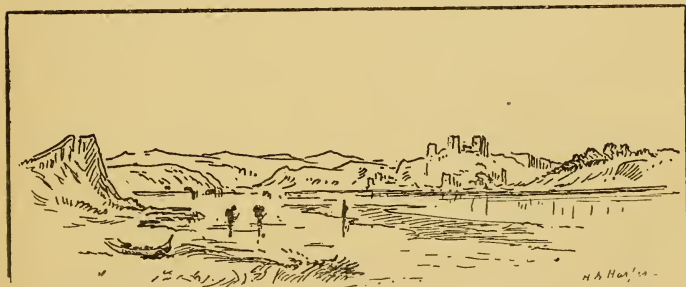
Tigris and Euphrates, and Sargon the first of Accad<sup>1</sup> had swept along this road on his great expedition to the West. He has left his image on the rocks of the Mediterranean coast; he even crossed the sea to Cyprus.

So Abram would be well acquainted with Babylonian power, custom, and worship. Tradition has it that he was so hated by the king of Babylon that that monarch attempted to take Abram's life, for that simple life was a protest against the dissolute conduct of the great Babylonians. Abram, the first Pilgrim Father, is to go forth from city life to make a new home in an unknown land. Terah dies, and now the direct call comes 'to leave his "father's house"—unto a land I will show thee; I will make of thee a great nation, and bless thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' What a promise is given to this wanderer, this emigrant! He is to be the father of a great nation, and *all* the earth is to be blessed through him. No wonder Arabs call him 'the Friend of God,' 'the Father of the Faithful.' We may note that Abram's name is found on an early Babylonian contract tablet. It is there written Abu-ramu, 'the exalted father.' Sarah is the Assyrian *Sarrat*, 'queen;' Milcah, daughter of Haran, is the *Milcat*, 'princess.'

Remember, when this emigrant goes forth he has not, says St. Stephen, so much as to put his foot on of the land promised to him. He crosses the Euphrates. He is called Abram, 'the Hebrew,' that is, 'the man who has crossed' (the two rivers). Probably he crossed at the ford of Bir. Then straight on would be a fertile tract. He must take that fertile tract, for he and Lot had 'flocks, and herds, and tents.' Thence they would go to Aleppo and Damascus. Some traditions say he was king of that city.

<sup>1</sup> The first of the ancient Mesopotamian Empires.

We know not. Then crossing the Pharpar stream, he must needs ascend the hills of Bashan, having on his left hand 'Argob,' now called El Lejjah, a barren, stony region. He would see Hermon, then known as 'Shenir,' the 'shining,' because of its perpetual snow-cap; and then he would see Galilee and its lake. All this is still the caravan route, and he and Lot with their company travelled much as Easterns do now. If we want to realise what Abram and his companions were, we must go to that Eastern land—little changed—and see. Their march was like a march of to-day; scouts in front and



BIR, ON THE EUPHRATES. THE FORD WHERE IT IS SUPPOSED ABRAHAM CROSSED.

flank, then the fighting men, after them the women and children, and last the baggage. Their camp would be just as to-day; their tents (the black camel-hair ones) are low—the only ones which will resist storm or tempest—not the 'bell' tent of travellers. These tents are scattered if the march is in spring when pastures are abundant; if otherwise, then in parallel lines or in a circle. The tent of the sheikh, however, is always foremost; first to face either guest or enemy. He must be first to exercise hospitality, or first to meet the foe. As the wind shifts so do the arrangements, for the Arab

tent must be closed on the windward side. When the weather is hot then the cloth is lifted and a current of air allowed to circulate all round. Any one can tell the tent of the chief, as it is larger, and the spears are planted outside it. No one, whether enemy or friend, would go to any tent but to that of the sheikh. Inside there are carpets, camel saddles, guns; and a fire in the centre of the floor. Cutting half-way across comes the curtain of the women's compartment. This does not reach to the roof, and so, screened by it, the women can listen to the conversation, themselves unseen. Perhaps it is dinner-time. There is rice boiled, served with lamb or sheep, placed on wooden platters on the ground, and then, *sans* knife, fork, or spoon, the feast commences. To the chief guest the sheikh will hand a morsel, and so on just as rank or birthright demands. Of conversation there is little—at dinner the Eastern is quiet. The sheikhs, as a rule, well maintain their position; shrewd, political, untiring; first in war and in debate; sociable, and ever willing to entertain strangers. Neither fatigue nor suffering ruffles their temper. Their complexion is dark; their eyes glitter from bushy eyelids; they have white teeth, and a stern expression. This latter is common to all Easterns, as to all men who live much in sunlight. Not only is the sheikh the leader in war or politics, he is also the religious leader, and his followers look to him for guidance in matters of faith. He is the head of the clan or tribe in everything. There is nothing that is not referred to him. Hospitable to travellers, no introduction is necessary. You are a wayfarer, a wanderer from home, therefore, Welcome to the black tents! The more out of the way you find a tribe, be sure the truer gentleman the Arab will be. Some tribes in close

contact with travellers are greedy, but are Arabs alone in that respect? Their wealth consists of flocks and herds or camels; they migrate from time to time as pasture gets exhausted. The camels have rich trappings worked by the women of the tribe. The wife of the sheikh has valuable bracelets for the wrists, and anklets, nose and ear-rings, and for the fingers too; coins of rare value will be twisted into her hair; her dresses will be many, various, and very rich. We have seen tumbled out of a common box and thrown on the floor for inspection, dresses which were valued at £50. Your Arab has no expensive house or furniture, so all his riches he gives to increase his flocks or to adorn his wife and children. He either hoards his wealth, or lavishes it on personal adornment. Servants he may have in plenty, they are members of his clan, and yet he will not disdain to make his own fire and cook his own food, and serve it to his guest. Do not all these characteristics accord well with what is written of Abram?

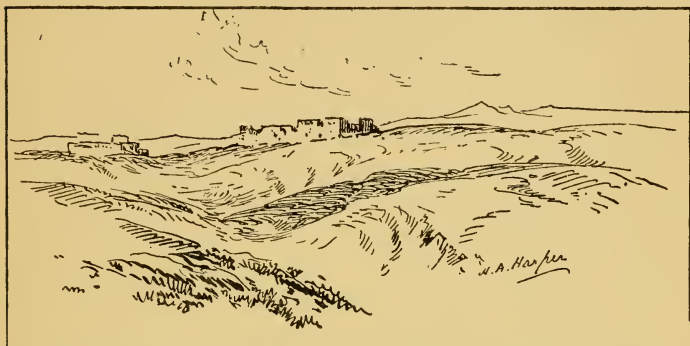
The country in which Abram and Lot now found themselves would strike them as very different from the land they had left; from their old home in the fertile flood-swept valleys of Ur they go to the limestone hilly country of Palestine, for crossing the Jabbok, now called the Zerka, they would cross the Jordan fords at Damieh, thence by an easy road to Shechem. There Jehovah renews His promise. On they go to the stony uplands of Bethel, build an altar, and then go south to the 'Negeb,' 'the dry,' the southern limit of the Holy Land, nearest Egypt. Abram would want winter quarters, for Bethel is wind-swept, and the pastures would soon be exhausted. We fairly can settle his route; he went by the 'way of Shur,' for it was the central road to Egypt, and traces of this 'way' have been found.<sup>1</sup> 'Shur' means 'the way of

<sup>1</sup> See Map 1.

the wall,' for the Egyptians had built on this, their most dangerous frontier, a 'wall.' Papyri in plenty tell us of this wall, how it had gates where 'watchers' scanned the horizon. Every stranger has to enter by these gates, their names are taken down and sent on to the king, and their reasons given for desiring to enter Egypt. Abram enters full of fear. His wife is 'fair,' he dreads she will be taken from him, so he suggests a white lie, a half-truth. The officers report his arrival and the beauty of his wife. The Pharaoh immediately orders her to be taken to his harem. She would have no veil, for this was not worn in the land from which Abram came, and to this day none of the Bedawin women south of Beersheba wear it. Probably during this time Sarai was given over into the charge of Pharaoh's servants to be purified, that is, 'fed up.' A plague to the king's household occurs, and Pharaoh returns Sarai to her husband. Abram entered Egypt under the old Empire. The time comes to leave Egypt, and they 'go up'—such a true bit of description, for from Egypt you *ascend* to Palestine—and now when back again at Bethel, Abram and Lot find the land too small. From a hill they look over the land. Lot chooses the valley of the Jordan because it was well watered. Abram takes the 'south' to Hebron. Here again comes in a true bit of description. When at Bethel we hunted about to find a hill from which to get a view of the Jordan valley, an Arab boy told us that the 'hill of stones' commanded the view of the valley, and there it was. The Bible calls the hill the place of the Altar, the Arab to-day calls it 'the hill of stones.'

And now occurs the first campaign recorded in the Bible. Chedorlaomer of Babylonia, following in the steps of his father, extended his empire. He had before this conquered Sodom and its sheikhs, and for twelve years

they had paid him tribute. For some reason they thought themselves strong enough to try to throw off the yoke. Swiftly comes the punishment; and what a march he made—1200 miles! He crosses the fords of the Euphrates,



EL PARAN, GEN. xiv. 6. 'NAKHL,' WÂDY EL 'ARISH, HEAD OF THE BROOK OF EGYPT,  
THE SOUTHERN LIMIT OF PALESTINE

takes Kadesh of the Hittites, Damascus, Bashan, Moab, the Horites of Mount Seir, then on to the desert of El Paran. 'Nakhl,' at the head of Wâdy el 'Arîsh, is where he turns. This was a great raid evidently to prepare the way for a future invasion of Egypt. He sweeps the Gulf of Akabah, takes Kadesh, the Oasis, then the country of the hill-men, of the Amalekites, and the Amorites; 'the cave-dwellers' fall to him also; from thence he marches to En-gedi, and so falls on the kings of the vale, who defeated fly; some are lost in the slime 'pits,' while Lot is made captive. This was one of the most wonderful marches of the world's history. Of late years several explorers have found quite a long row of 'pits' in this Jordan valley, which some think were 'pits' for storing water.

Abram had been in the high lands at Hebron, and

therefore out of the invaders' march. With his 'trained' servants and his allies he swiftly follows on, none knowing better than he the habits of Babylonian armies when gorged with plunder. Four days of swift marching, and he sees their camp. Puffed up with their unvarying successes, gorged with conquest, all warlike habits lost in excesses, they kept no watch. None had been found to stand before them; should they not now give themselves up to ease and indulgence? Doubtless the king and his nobles gave them example and licence. Successful armies in those days had no pity for the vanquished, and scenes of riot and sensual indulgence were ever the rule. They know not that a God-sent avenger is looking on their loose array: at night a skilfully arranged attack, in flank and rear, is made by Abram; the huge array in the dark are ignorant of the numbers of their foes; and being awakened out of a sleep caused by excesses, they are defeated. Lot is recovered; the pursuit is hotly kept up; and when Abram returns he declines anything for himself, but requests that his soldiers, 'the young men,' may be given what is their due. He thinks of 'Duty,' and 'Right,' those mottoes of warriors in our own roll-call of fame; for does he not say for the young men, 'Let them take *their portion*'?

Do not let us think of this 'old world' as ignorant, we are but just learning how educated they were. The tablets found at Tell el Amarna prove a great intercourse between Babylonia and Egypt. Before even the times of which we speak, Egypt had its papyrus, Canaan had its libraries, its scribes who kept their records on clay, which, when baked, is in that climate imperishable. Babylonia, too, kept its records, and we are only just beginning to decipher them; and from all these we see how 'settled'

were the populations of Canaan, how rich and fertile the land was.

Abram has no son, and yet to his descendants the land is again promised—the whole land from the river of Egypt unto the great Euphrates. Do not confuse the ‘river of Egypt’ with the Nile, for what is called ‘river’ in the Authorised Version should be ‘brook.’ This ‘brook’ of Egypt is what is now called ‘Wâdy el ‘Arîsh.’ It rises near ‘Nakhl,’ which runs a course of over a hundred miles, and falls into the Mediterranean Sea; truly it may be rightly called ‘the brook of Egypt,’ for none other can compare with it. Competent travellers have explored this brook, and described it. It is a well-defined gorge or valley, which really runs from the Mediterranean Sea past Nakhl to Akabah on the Red Sea; only those who do not know the country cast doubt on this being the true meaning of the Authorised Version. And so we see that the land promised to Abram was from the Euphrates to the ‘brook of Egypt,’ well south. The ‘brook’ never meant the Nile. Much confusion has been caused through this point of geography not being understood.

Abram does not come out well in his treatment of Hagar; perhaps he would have said he could not help it, for Sarai persuaded him to act as he did. We read afterwards of his sitting at the door of his tent, and, great chief as he is, he and his wife preparing food for strangers. You could see the same thing to-day. Hospitality is a command to an Eastern. An ‘inn’ or ‘hotel’ is unknown in the desert. True the sheikh of to-day will often expect a ‘gift’ in return, but as often he will decline.

Now Abram’s name is changed by God—to that of Abraham—because the promise that he shall ‘be the father of a multitude of nations’ is given him.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN

GENESIS xix.-xxxv.

The Probable Site of the Cities of the Plain—Abraham in Gerar—Ishmael—Beersheba—The Sacrifice of Isaac—Death and Burial of Sarah—Marriage of Isaac—Jacob and Esau—The Sale of the Birthright—Jacob at Bethel—His Service and Return—Shechem—The Cave of Machpelah.

ALL the cities of the plain, but one, are destroyed. Lot flies to that one for refuge. Abraham sees the smoke from Hebron. Where then were those 'cities'? Certainly not under the now-called Dead Sea, as Middle Age legends would have us think. We have proofs in plenty of that :— (1) Abram and Lot *saw* the valley of the Jordan from the hill above Bethel, but from no hill can the *south* end of the Dead Sea be seen. (2) Lot begs to be allowed to fly to Zoar, a 'little city,' and 'near.' There is a site called 'Tell Iktanû,' 'little,' at the *northern* end. This is probably the site of Zoar. (3) Abraham from Hebron sees the smoke. From no hill at Hebron can the Dead Sea be seen; but a depression in the hill-ranges, near the *northern* end, would allow the smoke from the Jordan valley to be seen. At this northern end there are a group of sites: those best able to judge are confident these mark where the 'cities' stood. It was 'fire from heaven,' that is, lightning—which, setting fire to corn and grass, burnt up the 'cities,' which would be built of the mud of the plain, and

that being bitumen, the smoke would be black. It was a *local* thing, for Zoar, 'near,' was not touched. In Zephaniah ii. 9 we read, 'Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation.' Many other passages could be quoted. The Bible never speaks of a *sea* covering the cities, but the New Testament says Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by *fire*, and that the 'cities' were turned into *ashes*. 'Cities'—well, they were populous villages—built just as the filthy modern Jericho is to-day, of soil of the plain with reed or straw roofs, like a modern Egyptian village in fact; and doubtless they were burnt by lightning. Geology proves that the deep depression of the Dead Sea, the lowest sea in the world,<sup>1</sup> must have existed from prehistoric times. The Dead Sea had nothing whatever to do with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the stories of palaces and pillars being seen in its water, are but the lively imagination of people who fancy they prove the truth of the Bible by telling wild stories. There is just as much truth in the statement that birds die if they fly over it. Why, birds can be seen any day in flocks skimming its waters. Fish certainly cannot live in it, for its waters are far too salt—so salt that if you try to swim in it, you bob up and down like a cork, and when you come out you are coated with salt before you have time to rub yourself dry. Its colour is beautiful, and so are the hills on the eastern bank; but it is a picture of desolation—a true type of sin; beautiful to look at—bitter and deadly to the taste.

Leaving Hebron, Abraham goes south to Gerar; this is now known as 'Umm el Jerrâr.' Water can be got in the

<sup>1</sup> The Dead Sea is 1292 feet below the level of the Mediterranean.

valley by digging. The king of Gerar, like the Pharaoh of Egypt, takes Sarah away from Abraham. This shows two things: that kings in those days did pretty much as they liked, and that Sarah, in spite of her old age, must have been a very beautiful woman. A 'dream' warns the king of his wrong-doing, so he has 'second thoughts,' and sends the wife back to her husband. Gerar was well known to the ancient Egyptians, and appears on the lists of Thothmes III. as Kerara.

We know the story of Hagar and her son, how she wandered into the wilderness near Beersheba, where she could find no water; and water there means life, want of water death. She puts the boy Ishmael under a bush, the 'Retem,' a broom bush. Many a time have we crawled under a 'Retem' to shade our head from the burning heat. The water which God shows her saves the lives of her son and herself, and Ishmael, growing up, becomes the father of the Bedouin; when grown up, he takes a wife, an Egyptian.

We then hear of Abraham's troubles about water; he sinks wells, and the people about dispute the ownership. So Beersheba is sunk, it is now called Bîr Seb'a: hereabouts there are ruins in plenty. These old wells were sunk with great judgment, and have been repaired often. Of this one the existing *masonry* is not very old, having been made by the Arabs 505 A.H.,<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* in the twelfth century, for an inscription relates how it was then restored. There are no trees there now, though Abraham planted tamarisk—the only tree that would grow there.

The sacrifice of Isaac follows. 'The land of Moriah' must be Jerusalem; some have said Samaria! but how

<sup>1</sup> A.H., *i.e.* Ante Hegira. The Arabs count time from the date of Mahomet's flight (Hegira) from Mecca in A.D. 622.

could Abraham get so far in *three* days? And then we are told they saw the place 'afar off;' so they would see Jerusalem, for, coming as they needs must over the ridge at Bethlehem, Mount Moriah would stand out against the sky-line. The ram caught in a thicket is offered in the place of Isaac: ever after we find the 'ram's horns' a sacred emblem, as when it was used in the decoration of Solomon's Temple; it was also the real origin of the Ionic ornamental capital in Greek architecture. In the latest investigations at Lachish its representation has been found.

Sarah dies, Abraham was apparently not with her, for *he comes* to weep, and to arrange for her sepulchre. A truly Eastern scene is now depicted. As a 'mighty prince' does the stranger come, but surely not to strangers, for these sons of Heth, 'Beni Heth,' understand Abraham without any interpreter. They, too, were a branch of the great Semitic family. Courteous as are all Easterns, fond of ceremony and 'red tape,' the whole is described in life-like words. To those who know Eastern life, how true it reads—ceremony, compliment, and then business! They offer anything, everything, as a gift, but all are politely declined. Abraham was a man of business, it must not be forgotten, so he buys the *field* and the *cave* and all the *trees* in the field—he buys up, in short, all rights; he pays current money; and then the deed is sealed, 'made sure.' How unchanging is the East! Buy your field if you like to-day, but there is another owner for the trees! You must buy him out. Is there a cave? You must buy that, before you have full, perfect, and complete possession of the land. Abraham is determined there shall be no 'tenant's rights' question with him: he now holds a legal undisputed title. And yet, though he has

been promised the whole land, all he himself ever possesses is a field, some trees, and a tomb !

He must think of the living, so he sends his steward to seek a wife for his son Isaac. The whole story hangs together, and is a true picture of Eastern life. The girl is willing, and goes ; she had been brought up in Eastern ways, by which daughters have nothing or little to say to the choice of husbands. In the south country, by Hagar's Well, she sees her future husband. Nothing is said as to religious ceremony, or wedding dresses. They pledged their troth in the presence of all, and that was considered enough.

Abraham was buried with Sarah. Isaac and Ishmael were present ; the death of their father had closed all strife. Afterwards they go different ways, Isaac keeping to the Land of Promise, while Ishmael goes to 'Havilah,' probably the gold region of the Sinai Desert, so well known to the Egyptians. Isaac has two sons. The very names of Jacob and Esau are household words with us now. The one rash, a hunter, an unthinking man. His brother Jacob thoughtful, home-staying, but crafty. Esau comes in one day hungry : probably he had been unlucky in his hunting—and wanting food ; he thought only of that. What good was his birthright to him ? so he sells it to his brother Jacob for a simple dish of red pottage ! We know not which to wonder at the most. Esau must have known what promises hung upon the eldest son, but probably he thought, what use are those promises ? we are to possess the whole land—we only own a tomb, and I am hungry. And Jacob, what of him ? he too knew the promises, but did he believe in them ? if so, then it was utter meanness to buy the birthright of the famishing man, and a brother too !

The birthright bought by this frugal dinner, Jacob then tells lie after lie to his blind old father, and obtains by fraud the blessing. He is soon found out, and after the old man's death his punishment begins. He has to leave home and tramp away to Padan-aram, the old home beyond the Euphrates, and perhaps, as he went on his tramp, he would often regret his trickery. This love of the old home is deeply ingrained in all nations, and the Arabs of the day still talk of the old homes in the 'Nejed.'<sup>1</sup> Post and telegraph unknown, still intercourse is kept up. Every wandering Arab tells to his host news of the distant family, and to that family others will in their turn tell of the dweller afar off.

Halting at Bethel, Jacob uses a stone for a pillow; he dreams that wondrous dream of the ladder. Our daily deeds are the steps, the ladder by which we climb to heaven, and though our foot is on the earth, our Elder Brother is at the top. The theory that the stone which is now in Westminster Abbey, called the Coronation Stone, is the very one on which Jacob laid his head, is absurd, but reasons do not prevail always against sentiment; people say it proves we English are the lost Ten Tribes. To begin with, the Ten Tribes were never lost, and then this stone in Westminster is common granite; at Bethel all the rock is limestone, and if Jacob were there now, he would find no lack of stones to rest his head on. People ask us sometimes, 'but cannot granite be got at Bethel *by digging?*' and they think that question all-overpowering; but where are we told in the Bible narrative that Jacob was a quarryman, and dug out his stony pillow? The leading organ of this Israelitish theory submits that though the stone may not be 'literally the same,' and

<sup>1</sup> The central district of Arabia.

that it may have been 'succeeded by another after the original perished,' yet that this stone 'is certainly a great bulwark of Christian evidence ;' against such an argument reason is useless.

Jacob nears the end of his journey ; he arrives at a well round about which the sheep are lying. Then, as now, wells were often covered by a stone. The girl Rachel is in charge of her father's flock ; that she was so doing, proves that she was not ten years old, for after that age, girls never go alone. Jacob rolls away the stone, and, loving the child at first sight, kisses her. To Laban, her father, he proposes to serve seven years for her, till she was of a marriageable age. But the man who had tricked his brother is tricked himself ! After serving for her for seven years, an elder daughter Leah is substituted ; if she were dressed as Eastern brides are now, it would be impossible for any one to know who the figure was under the mask and pile of clothing. Leah was 'tender-eyed.' Does this mean that she suffered from the great eye-disease of the East, or was it that her eyes were tender because she had to look after the bread-baking ? Those who have to do this in the East commonly suffer from inflammation of the eyes. Jacob has to serve another term of seven years for his beloved Rachel. He passes through varied episodes, but success always follows him. A longing for the old home takes possession of him : secretly he steals away, with all his household, but Laban overtakes them, and then there is a truly Eastern scene. Wrangle and accusation follow, but all calms down, peace is arranged. We do not know where Mahanaim was, but we do know that Jacob must have crossed the fords. The Zerka is a fine stream, with rapids, and trees on its banks ; and here takes place the meeting of the two

brothers. No wonder Jacob dreaded to meet his brother, but his fears were soon dispelled. Esau had great nobility of character in him, and not a word is said in anger; they part in peace, and Jacob buys land at Shechem. He would know how his grandfather and his father had had squabbles about wells, for no sooner had they dug wells than the natives objected. So Jacob, cautious and wily as he ever was, buys land, and on his own land digs a well, which exists to this day. Some years ago we camped there, and the Fellahin much objected to our painting, but when we read out from the Bible the story of Jacob, and then from the New Testament read the story of our Lord and the woman at the well, objection ceased, and cries of wonder rose all around, that a stranger, a 'man of the book,' could tell them all about their 'father' Jacob, while they knew nothing of us or of our country. Verily 'God is great,' and the knowledge of the infidels was profound. This old well is thought to have been originally 150 feet deep, it is now about 75, so much rubbish having been thrown in. It is a curious fact that all religions—Jews, Christians, Moslem, agree as to this being an authentic site, but then '*wells* are not in the habit of changing their places,' said the late Dean Stanley.

As Jacob went on to his father at Mamre, he would go through the hill-passes, cross the watershed, and over those very Bethel hills where he vowed his vow to the Lord. He must have thought over the difference between then and now; then, he was a fugitive, fleeing from a brother's just anger, having only his staff and water-skin and a little meal-bag on back; now, the husband of two women, the father of children, the master of camels, of herds of sheep and goats, and the owner of wealth and

to spare, for he buys this field at Shechem, though he is pushing on to distant Mamre. He, the first returning emigrant on record, having gone out poor, after long years of exile returns rich; how often his example has been followed, we English know well.

Jacob's buying this land is an indirect proof that he, like his grandfather Abraham, believed in the promise of God that they should inherit the land. So he brings his flocks to it, and invests capital in it. This is no war-like invasion such as seems to have been so common in those days, when the great growth of the population in the Euphrates valley, and the pressure for space and food drove masses of men in earth-hunger to migrate. The old inscriptions lately found show us many of these migrations; history has ever been full of examples. Wars have been occasioned by the ambition of kings, but often the secret cause of many of those wars was the want of space. We see the very same process going on even now in Africa, and America, when the whites, emigrating from their over-crowded lands, press on to occupy the thinly-populated lands of the native races. This sort of thing went on in Bible times; the only difference being, then, that their migrations are only hinted at in a word or two, whereas now columns and books are written to describe the work of the adventurers.

Jacob is but just in time to see his father; the old man soon passes away; the reconciliation between the brothers is ratified at the grave, for they sorrow together, and then separate: Esau founding the powerful kingdom of Edom, in those grand mountains by Petra, while Jacob dwells as a stranger in the land promised. But he is evidently a very different man from what he was in the old deceptive days; for he had endured years of trial

when an exile from home, had been parched with thirst by day, and frozen by cold at night while he kept Laban's sheep, and he too had been tricked. We may be sure that in those night-watches he thought over all the past, and, repenting of his sin, found pardon and peace, for did not the angels meet him on his way back? Were not the promises renewed to him? Did he not 'purify' himself and all his family and make them give up their false gods? This man of middle age has sorrow and trial; the consequences of his sin ever pursue him, but he is a pardoned man.

The cave of Machpelah, in which Isaac was buried with his father, exists to-day; but no man, at least for the last 500 years, has been permitted to enter that cave. The mosque at Hebron is built *over* it. Even into that mosque few (and those only royal personages and their suites) have been allowed to enter, for Hebron is one of the most fanatical of all the Moslem strongholds. Jealously guarded as Mecca, the foot of the infidel is not allowed to soil the sacred floor. The Prince of Wales with Dean Stanley, Prince Albert Victor of Wales with Sir Charles Wilson and Major Conder, have been allowed to enter the mosque; but, after all, the *floor* of the mosque is above the 'double cave'—for such is the meaning of the word 'Machpelah.' In the floor there was a circular opening, and, by means of a lamp, a dark interior cave could be seen. Doubtless there are means of access to that cave, but the Moslem guardians refuse access. Doubtless the cave is like many of the rock-cut caves of Palestine, and probably in it still repose the bodies of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

GENESIS xxxvii.-l.

Jacob's Sons—Joseph in Egypt—The Famine—Joseph and his Brethren—  
Israel in Egypt—Embalming—Revolution in Egypt.

JACOB now has a large family of twelve sons—shepherds living, as Bedawin do in these days, a free, healthy, out-of-door life, with no restraints, no master. Their life was like that of the shepherds employed by the squatters of Australia, and evidently they gave loose rein to their animal passions. Joseph, of a different nature, was a stay-at-home. His brothers were clothed in the usual white dress of their calling—a dress much the worse for wear. They chafed at the fine dress of striped red and yellow and green which Jacob had given to Joseph. He was dressed as a merchant of position or ‘gentleman farmer.’ Perhaps it could not be helped, but this favouritism on the part of the father only angered the brothers; and, perhaps, Joseph too did not bear his honour too meekly. He tells his father, moreover, of the evil doings of his brothers. Some blame him for so doing; but, remember, they had foully wronged and insulted their father, and it was Joseph’s duty, when asked, to tell. At the same time, he, knowing how jealous they were of him, showed either great simplicity or want of tact in telling them of his dream, which, he and they clearly saw,

foreshadowed that they would be inferior to him ; perhaps it was want of tact—but what could you expect from a lad of seventeen ?

Jacob's next step does not appear prudent. He must have known—he did know—that the brothers envied Joseph, and yet he sends him to see how they fare. Naturally they would look on this favoured brother with suspicion. Was there no trusty steward—no faithful servant—to send ? The boy frankly says : ‘ You wish me to go ; here am I.’ Duty to his father was an overpowering call. He has a long tramp from Hebron over the hills to Bethlehem, then past Jebus, through the passes by Bethel, climbing the water-shed which divides that portion of the land, then on to Shechem and so to the field his father had bought. His brothers were not there : he searches the land, ‘ the field.’ A native tells him they are gone to Dothan ; so past where Nablous now stands, leaving the hill of Samaria on his left hand, he climbs the steeper hill north, and then drops down to Dothan. Why did his brothers go there ? Simply because at Dothan you find the best pasture-land for sheep in the country-side. Ask any native now, he will tell you the same. Soon the quick-eyed shepherds see the figure against the sky-line ; they recognise it. Their descendants have not lost their power of seeing, as we have often noticed. Bedawin will tell you who the coming figures are, when to a stranger, even with a field-glass, it is impossible to make out the advancing company. It is ever so, the trained eye notes colour and form, and draws conclusions from the observation, when the untrained eye sees nothing definite. No sooner is Joseph seen than they conspire against him. One brother more merciful than the rest proposes that he should be cast

into a 'pit.' The 'pit in the wilderness' would be the well-known 'pit' dug to collect rain-water, twelve to eighteen feet deep, and as many across. It has sloping sides, and is dry in summer,—a place to put a prisoner in while they deliberated as to his fate.<sup>1</sup> 'The pit was empty,' we read in Genesis xxxvii. 25, 'there was no water in it.' Then, as no Eastern can deliberate without eating, they 'sat down to eat bread,' and then they lifted up their eyes from their feast and beheld a caravan! Yes, they were near the great caravan road from Damascus to Egypt, and the noiseless spongy-footed camels had stolen on them unawares.

Once sketching close to this place, and looking straight forward, suddenly we were surprised by the appearance of the Damascus caravan, which still travels the same route. We had heard nothing and seen nothing a moment before.

'They lifted their eyes.' Yes, and they knew that these merchants were open to any trade, linen or silk or slaves, anything on which a 'profit' could be gained. The bargain being struck, the captive slave is taken away, and from the hilly nature of the ground the caravan is soon out of sight. One brother comes well out of it; he was away, and the others told him not, but, adding shameful lies to their foul deeds, they dip the gaudy robe which they had taken from Joseph, in blood, and send it to their father. Cowards, too, they did not dare to take it themselves, but 'sent it.' They well knew what bitter sorrow this message and garment would cause; black as night their treachery, foul their deceit. Yet it is all recorded in Holy Writ, and why should we evade it? 'it was

<sup>1</sup> Artists who illustrate the Bible, without going to the land of the Bible, wrongly represent this 'pit' as a *well*, with a neat circular wall!

written for our learning ;' it shows what man can do. Moreover, it well illustrates the Arab nature, fond of trick and intrigue, with an utter inability to speak the truth or pay regard to promises ; not, perhaps, from intention, but they 'forget.'

The caravan would be soon out of sight ; it would go down on to the Sharon plain, thence by the 'way of the Philistines' to the Great Wall of Egypt, and entering there Joseph was sold to an officer of the guard. There is little of interest in the foul doings of Judah, for all centres now on the captive slave. The name of his master is purely Egyptian, and means 'The gift of the Risen One,' or 'Devoted to the Sun-God.' Doubtless Potiphar had many slaves, but this Hebrew lad soon distinguished himself ; he did his work well ; he acted from the highest motives ; he worked as if for the Lord, and in this service no work, no action is mean ; and men looked on and wondered at his cheerfulness. The master's eye soon noticed the new slave, and how well he did his work the Egyptian said 'that the Lord was with him ;' that is, he did his work without being looked after, and so promotion followed. Joseph is made overseer ; in that position he was just to those under his command. All went well, and the Egyptian's house thrived under the just rule.

Egyptian inscriptions at Thebes, Beni Hassan, and many other tombs, show us what the duties of overseer were. We see him in the house, the servants telling him the wants of the household ; or we see him in the field, attended by taskmaster and scribe, inspecting the stock, the number being taken by the scribe ; or receiving strangers, whom he questions as to the reason they come to Egypt, their occupations, the number of their flocks and herds. Note is taken of the presents for the master ; all

is written down. The game is brought in to him by the hunters; in one instance a gazelle or roe-deer is carried head downwards between two men on a pole. The fishermen bring him their catch of fish. Or he administers justice; in one case two boys are to be punished: one is already under the rod, the other holds up supplicating hands. You see the appeal will be vain. What their crime or offence has been we know not, but all is depicted. The whole life of the household hangs on the overseer, for the master is either soldier or priest, and cannot attend to such common matters. The overseer has to find the ways and means. He pays every one, and he takes all money. Occasionally the master is represented at an inspection, but his place is at the feasts or receptions, 'business' he leaves to his overseer.

Such was Joseph, for the text adds that the soldier 'knew not aught that he had;' the handsome youthful Hebrew slave was virtually the master. And now in this prosperity comes the temptation to Joseph, a temptation which comes sooner or later to every man; and Egyptian records enable us to see that it was no uncommon thing, for Egyptian women had even then bad reputations. There is a papyrus which tells the tale of two brothers, written by a scribe named Enna, in the thirteenth century B.C., in which the wife of the elder brother tempted the younger to do wrong; he refused; she persisted, and finally she 'made herself like one to whom an evil-doer had offered violence.' 'She falsely accused the younger brother, and her husband in a rage threatened his life, which was preserved by the sun-god.' All this and more can be read in the pages of the old writer.

In time of temptation well would it be for us all if we could but echo the words of Joseph. First he uses

argument and entreaty, but sums it all up with, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin *against God*?' Here was his lode-star, his faith. But again and again the woman repeated her temptation, grown more importunate by refusal; and then facts seem to tell against Joseph; circumstantial evidence is strong; but the soldier, though his wrath was kindled, seems not to have quite believed the story, for he did not execute Joseph, but put him in prison. At the same time we know that the ancient Egyptians were very loth to shed blood; and that they had a strict sense of justice. In prison Joseph found friends. His long years of service had made him known to many, and one of his friends happened to be keeper of the prison; and, a curious fact, the jailer makes his new prisoner the ruler of the prison, and gives control of all into his hands. Probably the mass of the prisoners were Semitics like Joseph. Anyhow, it shows how little the keeper of the prison believed the story. Joseph had a good character, he had lived a life open to the sight of all, and therefore, even in adversity, men did not forsake him. Probably all the servants and the keeper of the prison knew Potiphar's wife. Servants would know far more of her than she thought, and would look on Joseph as one falsely accused. They would have to keep silence for fear of consequences to themselves, but doubtless they were ready to show their goodwill.

The cup-bearer and chief baker had offended the king, so they are sent to prison, and are put in charge of Joseph. They dream, and Joseph interprets their dreams. One is to be restored to favour and place, the other to be hanged; and so it comes about. On Pharaoh's birthday an amnesty is proclaimed, and he gives a feast. All the servants are invited, but the cup-bearer forgets the Hebrew prisoner.

Egyptian inscriptions in plenty show us the feasts. Women were not excluded. Wine was often taken to excess, for we see women sick, and men carried away on the shoulders of their servants. This we can see in that great storehouse of the past—the tombs at Beni Hassan. That grapes were common too we see from pictures: at Thebes the vines were trained in bowers. Boys are employed to watch that birds did not eat the fruit, and fertile in expedient as were the ancient Egyptians, we see that they employed monkeys to gather the sycamore fruit and throw it to the gardeners; and with a spice of fun and strict regard for truth which all these early painters had, they show the monkeys often taking toll themselves, while the gardeners below are in despair! The baker or chief cook says he had three baskets ‘on his head,’ not only bread, but ‘baked meats,’ and all kinds of food. Here is a touch of a very accurate statement: men carried loads on the *heads*, women on their *shoulders*. In the tombs at Thebes endless picture representations are given of baking in all its branches, and a man with a basket on his head is carrying the loads away.

Two weary years drag on. Joseph must long have given up all hope; but though the wheels of God’s justice might seem to tarry, yet He is preparing the way. Pharaoh had a dream, and dreams in Egypt were regarded with religious reverence. Oracles were consulted, magic was used, the professors used animal magnetism, ‘hypnotised’ their patients; in short, all the power of the wise men failed, and then the chief butler remembered the days of his captivity and the dream. He tells the king; the command goes forth. Joseph is shaved, fresh garments given him, and he is brought before the king. There was no lack of barbers in old Egypt, for priests

shaved as a religious duty and for cleanliness, and nothing is more common than to see representations of barbarians as an unshaved people. The head—the whole face was shaved. Songs were written in praise of the barber. He is represented as being ever busy from morn to night.

Joseph frankly tells the king that he has no power of himself, 'power is of God.' The dream is explained and advice given which commends itself to the king. His courtiers follow suit. Surely they must have been surprised that they were all passed over for this Hebrew, but, too discreet and diplomatic to protest, they echo the proposed advancement of the slave. Pharaoh gives his ring to Joseph. The ancient Egyptians were very fond of rings, which were worn both by men and women. The left hand was more often chosen, and the third finger usually had a greater number of rings on it. Some rings were worn on the thumb. Signet-rings, like the one given to Joseph, were much like our seals of to-day. One ring has been found containing £20 worth of gold in it. It is half an inch in its largest diameter, bearing an oblong plinth, on which the devices were engraved, the emblem meaning 'Lord of Strength.'

Fine linen robes were also given to Joseph. Egyptian linen was famous. A bit found in a tomb at Thebes has 152 threads in the warp, 71 in the woof, to *each* inch, and this again is thickly covered with hieroglyphics. There was no lack of skill in those days, and certainly no lack of patience.

Joseph is presented with a gold chain. To see the skill of the early goldsmiths we must go to Beni Hassan again, and there the whole process of crushing, washing, and smelting gold is depicted,—the working into ornaments.

Some of the appliances may seem rude, but the skill is undeniable. It is just the same to-day. Go to the goldsmith's bazaar in Cairo, or Jerusalem, or Constantinople; give gold to the worker, and you will see him turn your sovereigns into bracelets, rings, or chains, just as you wish, and his appliances are so simple, so rough, that you wonder at the skill.

We may think the sudden promotion of Joseph strange, but there was only the will of a despot to be consulted. If such an advance never happened before, it has happened often since. The pipe-bearer of many an Eastern ruler has blossomed into the great Pasha; and as often, too, the great ruler has been at one blow stripped of his wealth, and sent out into the world a pauper. History, even of our own time, has seen the rise and sudden fall of many a Turkish or Egyptian prime minister. The whole story is Eastern, though it may not accord with our Western notions of justice and right.

The heralds go before the chariot of Joseph and cry to all to prostrate themselves before him. His name is changed to the Egyptian Zaphnath-paaneah. In perfect Egyptian it would run, *Za-pa-unt-pa-aa-an*kh, 'governor of the district of the place of life.' That is the part of Egypt which afterwards was known as 'Goshen,' for, bear in mind, 'upper' Egypt, as we now know it, had little to do with this Pharaoh. He reigned over what we now term the Delta. Upper Egypt, Thebes, etc., were held by the native Egyptian races. The Pharaoh of Joseph was undoubtedly one of the last of the Hyksôs or shepherd-kings, those invaders who had conquered Lower Egypt. From 'On,' the priest city, the ruins of which exist near Cairo, Joseph got his wife. Several canals in Egypt are to this day called the 'canals of Joseph.' Doubtless he

would open some to carry off the overflow of the Nile, and so fertilise the land.

Then seven years of plenty, followed by those of famine come to pass. We may not yet be able to find confirmation of this particular famine in the inscriptions, but inscriptions do frequently speak of famines; and at Beni Hassan one ruler tells how 'no one was hungry in my days, not even in the years of famine; for I had tilled all the fields of the district of Mah up to the southern and northern frontiers. Thus I prolonged the life of its inhabitants, and preserved the food which it produced. No hungry man was in it. I distributed equally, to the widow as to the married woman. I did not prefer the great to the humble in all that I gave away.' If this were so, then this governor was a just man. In another tomb it is recorded, 'When a famine arose lasting many years, I distributed corn to the city each year of famine.' Doubtless the famine would be caused by the lack of water, and it has been thought that the bursting of the bar or cataract of Gebel-silsilis was the cause. We know what harvesting and storing corn was like, for there are endless picture representations. Wheat was cut very short, just below the ear. The sickle was toothed. The ears were taken to the threshing-floor in wicker baskets, carried on a pole between two men. We know the weather was hot, for a reaper asks for drink, while another kneels down and drinks out of a water-skin. Present always is the scribe, who notes down the number of baskets, and tells it to the steward, who comes, staff in hand, to look on. Women are allowed to glean. We go on to the threshing-floor and see the oxen treading out the corn, or see the threshers beat it out with a flail. We see them winnowing with large wooden shovels. The corn is

thrown up into the air, and the wind blows the chaff away. When the crops are very heavy we see that the sheaves were stacked. Or we can go to the granaries and see the vaulted roofs. Steps outside lead to the roof, in which, through a hole, the bearers empty their baskets of grain. Scribe, taskmaster with rod, steward looking on, are everywhere represented. No detail is too trivial, nothing is omitted in these old pictures, and all in perfect accord with the brief accounts in Holy Writ.

What was Egyptian corn like? It was all bearded. The 'seven-eared corn' was grown in the Delta, where it is still cultivated. Little of this species is to be found in Upper Egypt; and Upper Egypt, remember, was not in the hands of the Pharaoh who promoted Joseph. At Medinet Haboo, near Thebes, is a representation of the coronation of a king who is declared to have 'put on the crown of the upper and lower countries,' and then the king offers to the gods six ears of corn.

The famine comes, and not only Egypt but all the countries about come for corn. Egypt then, as in later Roman days, was the granary of the old world. The store of corn which the foresight of Joseph had enabled the king to accumulate not only keeps his own people alive, but is a source of wealth, for people 'buy' it. The Midianite caravans spread the news, and Jacob, living his pastoral life in Canaan, soon hears that though his scanty corn crop has failed, yet there is plenty across the border. Long years have passed, but Joseph is not forgotten; the old man will not allow Benjamin out of his sight.

Again comes proof that it was Goshen where these great stores were, for Joseph's brethren come to the land of which he is governor, the border land. They had to pass the forts; they had to explain their business; and then, as

inscriptions show us, they as strangers had to appear before the governor. We cannot *as yet* find any inscription which we can without doubt refer to Joseph, but we do see many inscriptions where groups of people are supplicating refuge and food from the Egyptians. The great man listens to the strangers; he is accompanied by his guard; his scribe takes down the story. It would seem to have been no uncommon thing for tribes, or portions of tribes, of the Shasu ('Bedawin,' for such the wanderers are called) to seek security under the settled and mild rule of the early Pharaohs. How life-like is the whole story! And see how these brothers had learnt to speak the truth. They say they are 'twelve;' 'one is not.' That they had sorrowed for their great sin we see, for while in prison they admit one to the other that this 'distress' is the punishment; and hasty Reuben recalls how he had tried to save the boy. All this proves that though these rough shepherds had kept the secret of Joseph's fate from their father, yet they had communed over it and repented sore. Had Simeon been the ringleader in the crime when Joseph was sold? Anyhow, he is left bound while the others go back to bring Benjamin as Joseph demands. Dismay overpowers them when they find their money in the corn sacks. They recognise the hand of God in this, for they foresee that never again will they dare to go back for more corn. What a story they had to tell! The bewildered old man, full of grief, declares that Benjamin shall not go back. If Simeon is a prisoner he cannot help it, but the pet boy of his old age shall not go. He declares it would kill him; and yet, soon after, so dire is the famine that Jacob declares they must again go to buy food. They protest they dare not go without the brother, while Jacob asks, Why did you tell the man you had a brother?

Picture to yourselves with what heavy, aching hearts this band of brothers went down to Egypt again. The man had spoken 'roughly' to them; one of the band was in prison; they are going with the most beloved son of their father's old age. They feel that this is but the punishment for their sin, and yet the dire necessity of hunger, and their father's commands, compel them; and to add to their trouble there is that awkward fact to explain away, that of the money which was taken away in their sacks! No doubt that as they went, many were the fears and many the consultations as to their line of action. All hopes are lost when they do see the ruler again, for he orders that they are to be brought into his house, and they say one to another it is because of the money, and now they will be slaves. They try to influence the steward. They humbly cry to him. They tell him of the double portion of money they have brought. They are in despair. Re-assured by the kind words of the steward and the sight of Simeon, who has no story to tell of harsh usage, they are more than ever puzzled at the attention shown to them. The governor speaks kindly to them. He has not forgotten their story. Great man as he is, with the affairs of a nation resting on him, he can remember the 'old man,' and again in wonderment they bow to the earth. Egyptian pictures show us what this bowing was. It was, as the Bible puts it, bowing down 'to the earth.'

When Benjamin is presented, 'God be gracious unto thee, my son,' are the broken words of this great prince, who hastily quits the assembly. After a time he returns, and the feast begins. Benjamin is treated with distinction. The servants place the guests in the order of their birthright. How can they know all this? They sit by themselves, not with the Egyptians. Why? Though

Joseph was serving under a shepherd-king, yet the people, his servants, were native Egyptians, and native Egyptians hated Semitics, who were of the same race as the hated Hyksôs, and politic Joseph would do nothing to increase race hatred. With eating and drinking the brothers became 'merry;' they had lost their fears.

On the morrow, however, despair takes possession of them. They had gone on their way, when the steward with soldiers arrests them, and accuses them of theft; the charge is that they have stolen the silver cup belonging to the governor. They hear the charge, conscious of their innocence. They say, Let the thief die, and take us as slaves! The sacks are opened, and lo! in Benjamin's sack the cup is found! Imagine the feelings of honest men when accused of theft, strong in the consciousness of their innocence. They themselves had proposed a punishment, and yet there is the cup. What explanation can they give? Their grief is profound; they rend their clothes just as Easterns would to-day to express grief. They make no resistance, and go back.

Was there ever a more touching speech than that of Judah? Conscience had been busy with him in the past years. He admits their sin, their sin to God. 'Iniquity' was not to be hidden from Him. He says not what 'iniquity.' Their sin against their brother had haunted them, the long years had only made the chain more grievous. He gives up all hope, and says they must be all bond-servants. He has no suspicions, and sees no escape. His anguish is only more acute when the Egyptian ruler declines his proposal, and says in his turn: No, I will take only the guilty one; the one in whose sack the cup was found! Emboldened by mental anguish, Judah

then tells his pathetic story. He wails out : ' Take me ! I cannot bear to see the sorrow of my father ! I cannot bear it, it will kill him ! Oh, let the lad go ; make me your slave ! ' Self was lost ; self-sacrifice reigned. Love to his father, and remorse for past sin overpowered him. The man had sorrowed for his sin all those long years, and now the furnace of affliction had shown the true gold of his nature. Take *me* ! What more could he say ? ' He gave his life for his friend.' History is full of examples like this. The Divine life in all, shines often in the darkest places. That Divine self-sacrificing spirit is found in savage as well as in civilised life. All are but echoes of *that* Life which was given for the life of men. Thank God ! it does still reign. See that story Stanley tells in *Darkest Africa* where the ' savage,' finding the fainting officer in that dreary forest, does not thrust his spear into the prostrate body, but brings milk and restores the fluttering life. The fires of self-accusation, of remorse, had purified the nature of Judah, and Joseph could not resist the appeal—he was ' unmanned,' as people call it, and yet tears are the proudest proof of our Divine origin, for Jesus ' wept.'

This ruler, then, made himself known to those broken-hearted prisoners. What a revelation ! I am your brother ! How is our father ? Dumb with surprise these shepherds stand trembling, and now the ruler is the suppliant : ' Come to me,' he calls. His heart all those long past years had yearned for the family love. ' Come to me. Do not fret or trouble, all is for the best. God overrules all. He sent me before, that life might be saved.' Gone is all the remembrance of the treachery ; the years of slavery ; the foul accusation ; the weary years of imprisonment. His noble nature looks only on the

fact that God has blessed him that he might save life. 'You thought you were working your own bad wills. No! God is the Ruler. He has planned all this in love; it is His scheme. Not only your lives are to be saved, but those of these masses of Egyptians—his children too. Blessed be God! He has chosen me to be the instrument.' Was ever a nobler speech, was ever a nobler revenge, was ever a better piety shown than in this speech of Joseph? And then comes the practical wisdom of the wise Prime Minister. Something has to be done, and at once. Lose no time in explanations and congratulations, but go off at once and relieve the anxiety of my father, and tell him he must come to *me*. I am alive, and in Goshen, on the border. All of you must come, the famine is but commencing. Bring your children, your flocks and herds,—come. If you do not, then believe me, you will come to poverty. You will have to sell all you possess for food. The grain crop will fail yet five years more. Go! Benjamin can prove that it is I. Go! tell of my glory. I glory in this, that I can save father and you all. Go! haste ye, bring my father!' and the proud ruler breaks down. He kisses Benjamin, and weeps, and so do they all. What a scene! What grand touches of humanity are here related in the briefest manner! No wonder Pharaoh heard of it. No wonder, from king to servant all were touched. Truly

'When a noble deed is wrought,  
Our hearts with glad surprise to higher levels rise.'

The king indorses his Prime Minister's desires. He adds to these, and sends waggon. He says, in royal fashion: 'Do not think of your stuff'—your belongings,—'all the land of Egypt is yours.' Bewildered, as in a dream, the

brothers go their way. But it is not a dream, the rich presents, the waggons, the fine dresses, the Egyptian servants and guards, show it is real, and yet no one word of reproach, only one gentle request: 'See that ye fall not out by the way.' How noble, how splendid, the forgiveness of Joseph! This was indeed true revenge. It broke their hearts. As men walking in their sleep they took their way.

They meet their father. The story is too wild, too strange, too wonderful to be true. The old man's heart failed him. He could not believe it, and yet, tangible proofs, there were the waggons! they at least were facts. 'It is enough,' said the worn-out parent; 'I will go and see him before I die.' What more heart-stirring history could you read?—and it is all true!

Before we leave this, let us now calmly examine some facts. They kissed each other on the neck. So do Easterns now. Pharaoh sent 'waggons.' What were they like? They were two-wheeled carts. Except in one instance there is no picture representation of a *four*-wheeled cart or 'waggon' in any Egyptian inscription. Gifts were sent of changes of raiment. That is still the usual Eastern gift. If our own Queen gets presents from an Eastern potentate it is usually of shawls or silk raiment. 'All the good things of Egypt,' too, were sent—corn, bread, fruits, dates, grapes, and all those vegetables so grateful to dwellers in a hot climate. And which 'way' did they go? They must have gone by the central Egyptian road over the short descent to Beersheba, 'the way of Shur.' Traces of this road have been found; it was a well-known route, and passable for 'waggons,' as it was fairly level to Beersheba. After that, the hilly country would be impassable for 'waggons.'

‘Waggons,’ ‘chariots,’ and ‘horses’ being mentioned prove that Joseph ruled under a Hyksôs king, for all these were unknown in the old empire of Egypt. No priest of Heliopolis would have given his daughter to Joseph as wife unless the State at the time was depressed. Apepi was the last of the shepherd-kings, and he would favour shepherds, as we see he did, though they were an abomination to the Egyptians. Though the last of the Hyksôs kings had become a thorough Egyptian, he did not forget his origin.

We must note that it was ‘in the land of Râmeses’ that these brothers of Joseph were located—the best of the land as we shall see. Details follow of Joseph’s acts. He seems at first sight to have been a hard taskmaster to the starving Egyptians. It, however, does not lie with us to dilate on his acts. One fact stands out. The people say: ‘Thou hast saved our lives.’ The children of Israel ‘grew’ and multiplied exceedingly, and for seventeen years Jacob lived on. Still the old man longed for the land where his fathers were laid; and the promise was given that his body should rest there. The death-bed scene is tenderly related, and with his dying breath the patriarch names as his resting-place the Cave of Machpelah where lie Abraham and Sarah. The end has come. ‘Physicians embalm Israel.’

Embalming was of three kinds, according to the rank or wealth of the family. The rich paid £250, others less wealthy £60, and the third method was cheap enough for the poor. The Egyptians had a very firm belief in the immortality of the soul, and they believed that after 3000 years the soul would come back to the dead body, which accordingly they were careful to preserve. The process of embalming, which is clearly shown in

the inscriptions, took in all forty days; and the whole period of mourning lasted seventy days. Embalmers were members of the medical profession, and it is asserted by Pliny that during the process of embalming physicians made examinations so that they might ascertain of what disease the person died. It was death to cut a body, so the person who made the first incision was one who had been a criminal, and pardoned that he should undertake this office. When his task was done, he fled, and then was pursued into the desert.

The burial cortège with horsemen and chariots went to 'Atad, which is beyond Jordan.' We can see from this what road they took,—that central road by way of Shur, none other would be practicable. After that, they got to the hilly country, and there the chariots had to stop, and 'his sons carried him into the land of Canaan. Atad was *this side* Jordan. Moses, who wrote this account, never crossed that river, so the western bank would be to him the side 'beyond Jordan,' an indirect proof of the truth that Moses wrote this book.

Fear now takes possession of the brethren, who think that now that Jacob is dead, Joseph will execute his long-delayed revenge; so little did they understand their brother. He comforted them.

In course of time Joseph dies, is embalmed, and put in a 'coffin in Egypt.' Troubles began now to gather, and state affairs occupied every one's mind. The old Egyptian party was getting stronger. Their attacks were more persistent and frequent, and the Hyksôs kings had other things to think of than the state funeral of the Prime Minister.

The opening chapter of Exodus dilates on the wonderful increase of the children of Israel, but mentions that 'all that generation' had passed away, and that another 'king

over Egypt, which knew not Joseph' held sway. Such is the brief record that the sacred historian gives of the successful revolt of the old Egyptian party led by Ra Sekenen III., the king of Thebes, who had hitherto paid tribute to the Hyksôs monarchs. Apepi, the last of the invading Hyksôs kings, had failed to crush the native power. Ra Sekenen III., raising the standard of national independence, brought a large army into the field. The Hyksôs marching against him, failed, and year by year they lost ground. They lost Memphis, then Tanis; then all they held was their fortified camp at Auaris, on the eastern frontier, where they made a final stand. It is said their array was 240,000 men. Then death stepped in among their ranks. The Theban party had lost their king Ra Sekenen, but they had a new leader, Aahmes, who is said to have had a fleet as well as an army, and the Cushites or Ethiopians, a daughter of whose king he had married, were his allies. He assaulted Auaris, the fleet attacking on the lagoon side, the land forces on the other. For five years the conflict went on, till the hated Hyksôs were defeated. Aahmes must have been slain in one of these conflicts, for his mummy has been found head-split. He had fallen, but his cause triumphed, for his dead body was recovered and embalmed. The invaders being expelled, the power of Egypt was consolidated, and years of conquest under the descendants of Aahmes followed, which we read of in the inscriptions of Thothmes, his grandson. These tell of his fleet and armies. He it was who built Karnac. In time we come to Seti, to whom Egypt was indebted for the conquest of Syria. He in turn was succeeded by his son, Rameses II., the oppressor, 'the king who knew not Joseph.' His wars with the Hittites are fully recorded on the wall of the temples at Thebes.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE OPPRESSION OF THE ISRAELITES

EXODUS i.-xiii.

The Oppression of the Israelites—Egyptian Forced Labour—The Childhood of Moses—The Message to Pharaoh—The Building of the Treasure-Cities—The Death of the First-born—The Departure of the Israelites.

THE native Egyptians had driven out the invading race of Semitics. They had carried war into the country of the hated 'Shasu;' and yet, in their very midst, in their most fertile district, was a race of shepherds allied in blood and speech to the foe. These Israelites, it is true, had taken no part in the war of independence. They had attended to their flocks and herds, but they had multiplied—they had 'waxed exceeding mighty.' No wonder, then, that Rameses said: 'We must "deal wisely with them," for if war comes, haply they will join with our enemies and fight against us.' So hated were the Hyksôs, those shepherd conquerors, that, when the old Egyptian party succeeded, they demolished the temples, erased the inscriptions, and re-carved the statues of the Hyksôs kings, so that now it is exceedingly difficult to find traces of the long reign of these invaders. At Ismaïlia, and elsewhere, Sphinxes have been found of the Hyksôs period, which had been re-carved by Rameses. The native Egyptians wished to destroy all record of

the rule of the hated shepherds, and this somewhat enables us to understand the hatred the new king had to the children of Israel.

The Israelites, though they had not fought, are now oppressed; they are set to build treasure-cities—Pithom and Rameses. Where, then, were those cities? We do not find any inscription relating to the Israelites working, but we do find endless pictures of work in building cities and treasure-cities, and this will open a chapter full of interest. The Bible statement is short; it runs that the Israelites had a hard life. 'Their lives were made bitter with hard bondage in mortar and brick,' all manner of service in the field, and all their service 'was with rigour.' This Rameses was a great builder; though he did not erect buildings as grand as those of Seti, yet his works were endless, and all accomplished by forced labour. It may be, as some think, that the 'Aperu,' of whom the inscriptions of his time so often speak, were the Hebrews; anyhow, his great works were executed by foreign workmen; and all Egyptian records tell of the heavy forced labour of multitudes. One picture at Thebes shows us how these Aperu worked. We see the captives drawing water in jars from a deep tank in which lotus lilies are blooming, and around which trees are planted; others are engaged in breaking up masses of earth with hoes; others carry the moistened clay, which their comrades place in wooden forms, and arrange the shaped bricks in rows to dry in the sun. The bricks when dried are stacked, and carried when needed in slings suspended from yokes. Another gang bears stone and mortar, and at the end of the scene is a carefully-constructed wall topped and partly faced with stone. One overseer with his staff under his arm is watching; another, staff in

hand, follows the workmen. Dr. Brugsch reads the main inscription. 'Here are seen the captives who were carried away as living prisoners in very great numbers; they work at the building with dexterous fingers; their overseers show themselves in sight. These attend with strictness, obeying the orders of the great skilful lord who prescribes to them the works, and gives directions to the masters; they are rewarded with wine and all kinds of good dishes; they perform their services with a mind full of love for the king.'<sup>1</sup> Such is the official statement; but further on the overseer says, 'The stick is in my hand, be not idle!' There prisoners are seen building a provision house and a sanctuary. The taskmasters were Egyptians, the overseers Israelites: they were the interpreters and chiefs of gangs,—they, too, were beaten like the common workmen. A scribe telling a tale of men working, states that twelve men, engaged in the fields in making bricks, having neglected their task 'of producing their tale of bricks every day,' were *set to work in building a house*; and it was added that their toil was not to be relaxed. We read also of the exact amount of grain these workmen were allowed. As a political leader Rameses was acting up to his light. These Israelites were a branch of the Hyksôs Semitics, they had been petted by the usurping king. They, the old Egyptian party, remembered with bitterness their own long struggle, and they hated and distrusted all who reminded them of their past subjection. This and much more is meant when the Bible says there arose up a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph! What the new ruler did was supported by his subjects,—it was a national and race hatred.

The Israelites were oppressed, still they increased; but

<sup>1</sup> S. Lane Poole's *Cities of Egypt*.

the resources of Egyptian civilisation were not exhausted. The edict goes forth that all male infants are to be destroyed, female infants only to be spared; there would be nothing to fear from them, and they would be useful as slaves in the kitchen or as slaves in the harem. We all know the story of Moses, the ark of bulrushes, and the Egyptian princess. Many have been the guesses as to who that kind-hearted lady was. It is generally thought she was a daughter of Seti I., the father of the oppressor; some say she was a widow and childless; anyhow, she had a woman's heart, and cared for the helpless babe. Owing to the mother-wit of the child's sister, the child's mother was the selected nurse.

And so the long years rolled on; Moses lives his life at the court at Tanis. No doubt his own real mother had told the boy who and what he was, had spoken into his ears the promises given to Abraham, for was not his real father one of the tribe of Levi, and the mother too? and from his mother's lips and at her knee—as do all great men—he learnt all about God and his own forefathers. Sunken they might be now, yet the story would ring out of the great Joseph and his father, and the stately ceremonial with which they were greeted, and of the great promises yet unfulfilled. Outwardly, Moses was an Egyptian prince, at heart he was an Israelite indeed. He feels he cannot live at the court any longer, he must go and see for himself how his brethren fare. So from Tanis and its court he goes to the land of Goshen, to those fields of labour where the great wall was building, or rather where it was being repaired and strengthened.

Those 'treasure-cities,' cities to store corn, were on the weak and most assailable frontier—cities which should act as fortresses as well as depots for corn and munitions of war,

camps of observation to keep a watchful eye on the hated 'Shasu.' Forty years old was Moses when he saw for himself the oppression of his brethren. Indignation overpowered him, he took the law into his own hands and slew an oppressing overseer, thinking that the captives would see in this act a sign of deliverance. They understood it not—on the contrary, they sought to make favour with Pharaoh by telling him. At once Moses has to fly, and to Midian. Do we know which route he took? Yes, very well indeed, for there were three roads out of Egypt on this frontier—one leading past the forts was the 'way of the Philistines,' the other middle one was called 'the way of Shur.' This latter he could not take, for it led past the gold mines, and Egyptian soldiers were stationed there, of whom more hereafter. There remained only 'the way of the Red Sea,' so undoubtedly it was by that way that he went past Sinai, crossing the head of the Gulf of Akabah, and so to Midian. There he was safe, for Pharaoh's rule did not extend to Midian.

A quiet pastoral scene meets the eye of the fugitive; he settles there, and marries. He is considered an Egyptian, and so he would look by dress, but he did not forget when children were born to him that he was a stranger. The oppression in Egypt continued. The first tyrant dies; Egyptian inscriptions show that Rameses II. had a long life. Wearied with toil the Israelites turn to God, and He hears—He had not forgotten. The scene is now shifted to far-away Midian, where lies the future law-giver and leader. The promises are renewed to him. Modest, as are all great men, Moses says, 'Who am I?' Signs are given him; still he argues that he is not a ready speaker, and masses of men are moved by oratory. Aaron, who, we are told, was a ready speaker, is to meet him.

Where the 'khan' was at which Moses rested we do not know, but probably it was at the station now called Nakhl. Moses and Aaron call the elders together and tell them the news. These elders and the people believe the delegates, and worshipped the Lord. Boldly go these two men to the great king. Picture to yourself the amazement of such a ruler, he whose slightest wish was law, on being told that these slaves acknowledge a God whom he knows not. He, the king, was worshipped as a god, and they dare to tell him they wish to sacrifice to another. Gods of the people about he knew of, but the Lord God of Israel—despised Israel—who was He?—and a stern 'No' rang out.

Moreover, Rameses turns the tables on Moses and Aaron, and asks why they dare to assemble these people and cause them to lose time. Stricter orders are given out: the king says, There are plenty of you, your labours are too light; if you have time to conspire against me—well, then, more work shall be given you; and so the taskmasters are told that no more 'straw' is to be given.

Why no more *straw*? All Egyptian bricks were made of Nile mud, and this mud was mixed with 'chopped straw,'—for such is the real meaning of the word translated 'straw,'—to bind the bricks. They are told they must gather 'straw' for themselves, and then they have to scatter over the land to gather the last season's stubble, and yet the sum-total of the bricks was to be the same. The taskmasters 'hasten' them. We see from the inscriptions what that meant—a liberal use of the stick—they were beaten. They send a deputation to Pharaoh; he haughtily answers, 'Ye are idle.' He repeats the order, refuses any concession, and the poor, degraded, beaten souls then turn on their delegates and blame them. Really what Pharaoh said was this: 'If you have time to

discuss your position, it proves that your time is not fully occupied.'

It will be seen that chopped straw was forbidden to be given to the Israelites—has discovery anything to say about this? Yes, we all have heard of the Suez Canal, that waterway which connects the two seas. A half-way town was erected on this canal called Ismaïlia, after the Pasha who then ruled over Egypt. About twelve miles from this there is a wady (*i.e.* a watercourse) called Wâdy Tumulât; the Sweet Water Canal, a canal of 'sweet' or Nile water which was made to give water to the hosts who made the sea or Suez Canal, runs through it. Near here were some well-known mounds, which we have looked on ourselves. A statue was found there long ago, and so the Arabs called it Tell el Maskhuta, 'The Mound of the Statue.' When the insurrection in 1882 under Arabi took place, he made his entrenched camp here; and various statues were then found. In 1883 M. de Naville commenced excavations here; he noticed that all the stones were dedicated to the god Tum. Scholars had before said that Pithom was Thoum, meaning 'the enclosed place' or town. It was then seen that Pi-Tum meant the abode of Tum, the god sometimes known as Harmachis. In 1884 discovery went on, and then a tower was discovered. It was square, with a brick wall twenty-two feet thick, measuring six hundred and fifty feet each side. The whole space was divided into chambers, each with brick walls eight to ten feet thick, but with no windows, and no doors. Recesses showed that beams had been used, and that these buildings were of two stories. Inscriptions on bricks were found; they had the name Pi-Tum (Pithom). All were built of bricks; some of these bricks are to be seen in the British Museum.

The lower courses of these walls, and for some distance up, are of well-made bricks with chopped straw in them, but higher up the courses of bricks are not so good, the straw is long and scanty, and the last courses have no straw at all, but have sedges, rushes, and water-plants, in the mud. Was ever a more wonderful story in brick told? Read again the story in the Old Testament, see how the labourers first have straw, then none is given them, then they gather 'stubble,' and then, poor souls! they scatter to gather what they can of weed or rush, by those water-courses in the Delta.

Give up, once and for all, the idea that the Israelites had anything to do with Cairo, or with the Pyramids; that the Pyramids were built by the Israelites, or that Abraham directed the building of them.

Many inscriptions have been found in the excavations at Tell el Maskhuta (Pithom) relative to Rameses, proving completely that these were the 'store cities' built by Israelitish labour, for the store of corn which would be necessary for armies who were about to cross the desert, or for troops who were to be concentrated there in camp. These cities were also fortified. That poor people lived there we know from the various implements found; we find that troops were stationed there also, from horses' bits, daggers, knives, axe-heads, scale-armour; and then we see that rich people also lived there, for golden ornaments, chains, earrings, and gems have been found. To read the whole account of the discoveries here, is as fascinating as any fairy tale.

It would be most interesting, had we space, to follow up and describe the varied events which follow the plagues, the hard-heartedness of the king, the many visits the chosen two made from the camp at Rameses to the

court at Tanis—about thirty miles—till the last great plague of all, the death of the first-born, when at last the king broke down. It has been too commonly asserted that Egyptian inscriptions were silent as to this: it is not so. The broken-hearted king has left many records mourning over the death of his son, who had been associated with himself in the government of the country, and the son would appear to have been chief in the command of the troops. Let us look only at one inscription; the Bible statement runs—

‘The Lord smote  
The first-born of  
Pharaoh  
That sat on his  
Throne.’

The inscription on the side of a statue of Menephtah runs—

‘He who governed  
Egypt  
In behalf of his  
father.  
Seti—Meneptah.  
*Deceased.*’

But now these beaten slaves are implored to leave. They borrowed all they required. They had long been in expectation of a move, and were therefore more or less ready; but it was from Rameses and Succoth that this huge migration set out; this mixed multitude with flocks and herds. You can see something like this migration now; for when the caravan of pilgrims starts annually from Mecca, the noise, the confusion, the great extent of ground taken up, would present a true picture of the Exodus. In old days these migrations were common, but this one is peculiar in this, that the proud

kingdom of Egypt is parting with a mass of useful slaves. And where are they to go? Ah! there are many things to be explained here, and perhaps before we prove what they did do, we may as well decide what they did not do. They *did not* start from Heliopolis, near Cairo; they *did not* go to Suez; they *did not* cross the Gulf of Suez; they *did not* cross the 'Red Sea.' We can prove all these points. Let us take them in order. The confusion as to Heliopolis comes from this: it was a city of the Sun-god, *the* city Josephus speaks of (and it is this historian who has been so misunderstood). Was not the Heliopolis in Goshen?—not the Heliopolis near Cairo, whose ruins have been discovered, explored, and described. As to Suez, the Israelites lived *in Goshen*, and that is proved to have been not far from Ismaïlia in the Delta—in short, many miles from Suez. As to 'Red Sea,' the Bible never says they crossed the 'Red Sea.' The Hebrew words are clear, meaning the 'Sea of Reeds,' or the 'Reedy Sea;' this opens up our view, and is in entire accord with all close investigation of the land. All the wonders were wrought, so says the Bible, 'in the field of Zoan.' This is Tanis (San)—it has had many names, its mounds show many periods, it was a position which every age would see was necessary to fortify, it commands the desert route. And, strange to say, the people who live there can be proved from facial type to be descendants of those very Hyksôs kings who made it their court. It would appear from Egyptian records that it was at Zoan that the crowning victory took place, when the native race expelled the Hyksôs.

## CHAPTER V

### THE EXODUS AND THE DESERT ROUTE

EXODUS xiv.-xxxiii. ; NUMBERS xii.-xxxii.

The Route of the Israelites—The Crossing of the Reedy Sea—Hardships of Desert Life—Sinai—The Tables of the Law—The Twelve Spies—The Discontent of the People—On the Borders of Canaan.

THE mass has started; they are not to go the 'way of the Philistines, though that is near,' lest they see war. It was 'near,'—a few days' journey only,—and from Goshen they could cross the frontier and get by way of Wâdy el 'Arîsh to Philistia; but they would see war, indeed, for there was the wall, the gates, the forts, and all strictly guarded, as endless Egyptian records prove: forts, with glacis and counterscarp, which we moderns fondly think are *our* invention! Many Egyptian inscriptions speak of this wall, these forts, and the almost impossibility of passing them. Then they could not go the 'way of Shur,' for there, as we shall see, were the Egyptian stations and soldiers to protect the miners; so they went by the 'way of the Red Sea.' A huge array, they go to 'Etham,' which is but another name for Shur, the 'wilderness of the Wall;' a cloud leads them by day, by night a pillar of fire. By the present Wâdy Tumulât they must go, there is no other route. There they 'turn:' this is what gave Pharaoh courage. 'Now I have them,' said he. Just as Napoleon

the Great, when he found that Wellington had retreated to Waterloo, said, 'Now I have them, those English!' Migdol only means a tower: it was some fortified post. Pihahiroth means 'edge of the sedge,' or 'where reeds grow;' Baal-zephon, 'lord of the north,' some high peak. Pharaoh hears of this 'turn.' He well knows the land: they have blundered, says he, and so with chariot corps he goes in pursuit. Why chariot corps? Well, Tanis was the place where this *corps d'élite* was stationed; it was the only position where chariots were needed. Tanis was the court, so there were the 'Guards,' six hundred in number. The chariots were two-wheeled carts; a driver, and a soldier, perhaps an officer as well, in each—not more. We know from Egyptian records that at this very moment there was an insurrection in Libya, and so the infantry has been sent off there.

Let us pause for a moment to explain that though the general lie of the ground is probably much the same as in the days of Moses, yet there has been an elevation of that land. Geology proves, what in fact any one can see, that the 'sea' has receded: the raised beaches show where the old levels were, and in the days of Moses, what is now called the Gulf of Suez extended *inland* to what is now called Lake Timsah, or the Lake of the Crocodile. The present Suez Canal only connects these lakes or lagoons; they were 'reedy' or 'weedy' in the days we are writing about. What M. De Lesseps did was to reconnect these lakes, and then make a short canal to join them on the one hand to the Gulf of Suez, and on the other to the Mediterranean Sea, westwards. Lesseps, after all, only did in modern times what Seti I. did long ages ago, for that king made a canal. Inscriptions at Thebes show him returning from a Syrian

campaign; he is stopped by a canal and a wall. Priests meet him; there are great rejoicings. This canal is called 'the cut through;' sailors now call it 'the ditch.' The account of the opening of Seti's canal reads strangely; it is said 'that commerce will benefit by the canal, that corn, animals, elephants, and various other animals will now be brought into Lower Egypt.' The proofs of all this exist. The old canal banks can still be seen not far from the battlefield of Kâssâssîn. In the days of Moses, therefore, this was a quiet sea, which cut off the Sinai descent from Goshen, and gave the Egyptians a safe frontier. Where the sea ended, there they built the great wall.

Pharaoh thought the people would take the short cut through Philistia. Finding they did not, he says, knowing the land well, 'they are entangled in the land;' for had they gone on, there was nothing in front but desert to be closed by the mountains of the Râs Attâka. He had let them march on. His scouts told where they were, and so hotly in pursuit he hung upon their rear. They were overtaken; they see the dreaded chariot corps, and then coward-like they accuse their leaders. 'Were there no graves in Egypt?' say they; they knew of the great burial-grounds. At the first check they lose all heart and blame Moses. The years of servitude had crushed out all manhood, for they even say they would prefer to serve as slaves than die free men! Was ever a more difficult task set these leaders? Most have some corps of old soldiers, of brave men, to 'stiffen' the ranks of the recruits, but Moses has nothing of this sort to fall back on. They are told to *do*, not to bewail. 'Go forward!' rings out the command. The cloud of fire went behind the host; it was 'darkness' to the Egyptians, but the night was made

luminous to the flying host, who, divinely led, press on through the parted waters. Blundering on in their rear came the Egyptian chariots, when, finding that they 'drove heavily,' or were as if the wheels were 'bound,' the captains too late turned to fly. As the waters had previously receded, so now they return; Israel is saved, and the Egyptians cast 'dead on the sea-shore.'

Where did all this happen? certainly not at Suez, for the host went *three* days in the wilderness, and found no water. Had they crossed at Suez, three hours would have taken them to the oasis. No; the crossing was over that 'Reedy Sea,' somewhere not far away from where the present town of Ismaïlia stands. It has been suggested that as the host camped at 'Migdol,' which means a 'tower,' this fort had been erected to guard some ford, which, at certain states of wind, became passable; it was a divinely ordained occurrence. In the wilderness of Shur, or 'the wilderness of the Wall,' they would have to march *three* days before they came to the oasis, 'The Wells of Moses,' which oasis consists of a number of ponds, filled by springs. And so the Arabic is truer than the English, for the Arab word is 'Ain,' spring; the word 'well' gives an idea of a deep circular hole, and these are not wells. The water is brackish and impregnated with iron; Arabs call brackish water 'bitter.'

And now that the host is fairly on its way let us consider their march. It would not be like that of an army on high roads, close column, for the multitude was composed of various elements. The men may have marched in rank, but then there were the women and children, 'the mixed multitude,' also, of those who had intermarried during the long past years, 'the flocks and herds;' so they would straggle over many tracks on this Shur desert—a

thing they could easily do, for it is a rolling plain with one or two great depressions or passes, and it is traversed by great water-courses where the rain floods from the 'Tih' mountains cut their way to the sea. Stunted bushes grow all over this plain—a bush camels delight in. The marches would often be at night, to escape the heat. Just as the Mecca caravan marches now, a straggling, noisy, chattering mob, camels, asses, people, all mixed together, making a multitude only to be seen in the East at the great religious gatherings. The people would carry water in the skins just as now. The marches would be short. The food would probably be as at the present day. Bags of meal are carried, and this is mixed with water, and eaten just as it is, or if there is time and fuel, then it may be baked between two stones. Moses had not forgotten to carry the mummy of Joseph.

Familiar as they were to the Delta, this first march in the desert must have been a great trial to the Israelites. They saw no green trees, no grass, no water, no heavy corn-land, nothing but sand or gravel, the Red Sea far away on right, and the Tih Mountains on the left. No wonder they counted the palms at Elim, where they found good water from springs, a brook or burn bubbling out and running into the sea, through a mass of tangled fern and grass. They halted there some time. We may pity them, for now indeed they have to go through a barren mountain chain of rocks and gravel—not a bush, not a blade of grass to be seen. Free men as they were, they 'murmured.' Try to imagine how this leader, Moses, had to lead this unthinking mass of humanity through a barren wilderness—nothing there but barrenness. These poor souls were not of the stuff of which heroes are made, for they speak of the 'flesh-pots;' in slavery, 'they did eat

bread to the full.' Was ever a leader in such a plight? No one believed in him, and yet, from this coward mass, great warriors, poets, and prophets were to come. Manna was given—'a small round thing.' This was not that



REFHIDIM, WADY FEIRAN, DESERT OF SINAI.

gum which comes from the tamarisk—that could not be *the* 'manna,' for the district where the host now was is barren of tamarisk trees. All we know for certain

about it is that the Almighty God fed them; so let us be content—nothing is too small, nothing too great for Him. What a people they are! They have seen deliverance after deliverance, and yet they have no faith in God or man. The moment their creature comforts are touched, then they rebel. So at Rephidim they have no water. Ah! you who live in the West think hunger is perhaps the greatest trial. Ask those who have lived in hot desert lands, and all will agree that *thirst* is *the trial*. We have felt the same, and know what it is to suffer hunger, but oh, the torment in a hot and weary land of suffering thirst! The Amalekites, a border tribe, fought for the oasis, which was doubtless what is now known as Wâdy Feiran. No water in that thirsty pass for many a mile, and then as the pass opens out they come upon water! They fought, as do Arabs now, for the springs; if these are in the possession of the enemy, they must fall back or die. We saw this in our campaign in the Soudan, when our generals by a forced march took the Gadkul wells.

And now the host comes to the wilderness of Sinai. Many have been the speculations as to the exact route. As for ourselves, we feel little difficulty as to that route, for we consider that in a mountain country you must perforce go through the passes. We have in *The Bible and Modern Discoveries*<sup>1</sup> attempted to show the very route those people must have gone. What we say now is, that the country through which they passed may and has probably changed somewhat; but, at the same time, for people who had been bred in the flat, well-watered land

<sup>1</sup> For details of the whole route and mountains, see my book *The Bible and Modern Discoveries*, published by the Palestine Exploration Fund.

of Egypt, to come into this rocky mountain-land, scanty water and scanty verdure must have been a great trial. We read the history and think them cowards. But you must remember that it is one of the most difficult countries for any one to travel in, even when provided with every comfort. So when you read the account in your Bible, do not cast a stone at the Israelites. Wait till *you* have gone over the same ground yourself.

Revolts, we read, take place among the people; but on they go; they get guides. Moses neglects nothing. But, poor souls, though free, they sigh for onions! What a depraved taste, you may say. Many expedients have we adopted to get these favoured vegetables in the desert. In various parts of the East onions are a safeguard against fever; they give relish to your hard bread. Remember, there you do not have your dinner of many courses, but vegetables only are longed for—man can live on them. No doubt these poor Israelites, with no heart in them, did ‘sigh’ for the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. They said that without them they were dried up. Probably it was true. They would not have the sleek look of the Egyptians, who lived on vegetables.

The truth of this history is substantiated by the fact that the masses have always grumbled about their food. *The* struggle with the poor man is always for existence. Leaders may have the great aim, the masses only see the privations, the dire effort to live. Many a modern expedition shows us the same thing. We do not say for a moment that the leaders did not fare as badly as the masses; but while the leaders were sustained by a great purpose, the people were unthinking, and when food failed

they always did and ever will rebel. They loathed the manna, they longed for 'flesh.'

The host has arrived at the Mount of God—Sinai—which is a grand chain of mountains ending with a bluff, or cliff, which faces the only plain in the peninsula which could give camping-ground for the Israelites; there the law is given to Moses. We sometimes see pictures representing Moses carrying down what look like two heavy tombstones. Really the ten commandments could be written on a bit of stone no larger than your hand, as you may see from the Deluge Tablets in the British Museum. Not long since we heard of a young man, who was acquainted with mountains, becoming an unbeliever, because he said he could not believe Moses carried a 'pack' of stones on his back down a steep mountain. There is nothing in the Bible to warrant the idea of the tables of the law being of so large a size. Then Moses could not have come down the mount in front; that is impossible. It is not difficult for an active man to ascend on either side up one or the other of the two passes. It is really a grand mountain, though not of the largest or highest.

There is a common idea that the Israelites were constantly on the move. The Bible is clear. Sometimes they halted for a 'week,' a 'month,' a 'year.' They, in short, did as Bedawin do now. They stayed at a place till the pasture for their flocks and herds was exhausted. Barren as is the greater part of Sinai Desert, yet there are wadies where the grass grows high, where water is abundant, and shade from trees good; and we know that there were formerly more of all these benefits, for we can see traces of fresh-water lakes, in which mussels lived. You can pick the empty shells out of the

banks now, or find them in heaps in the old workings of the mines, for Sinai is rich in minerals. Gold we have found in many places, but, then, there is no water, and so it would be impossible to work it, for want of water to keep your miners alive. We must not wonder at the frequent complaints of the Israelites as to scarcity of water. None but those who have experienced the want can understand the terrible agony of it. For flesh the people had quails; this is a most delicious bird. It usually flies by night at the time of its migration, flying only a few inches off the ground, for such is the meaning of the passage.<sup>1</sup> A wind brings multitudes to the people, and the tired birds are easily captured; but though their wishes were satisfied, the 'people that lusted' for flesh did not go unpunished.

The prophetess Miriam was, as we know, smitten with leprosy, that foul Eastern disease, which of late is much on the increase. Any one who knows the East can tell of the sad sights of this awful deformity.

From Hazeroth, which means 'camp,' they go to Paran, which would be the region of NakhI, where there is now a fort to guard the caravan route. Nearing now the promised land, spies are sent out, with their separate tasks allotted. They bring back grapes. Here, again, is a common mistake. Proofs are in plenty that grapes were grown much further south than Hebron. The old grape mounds still exist, for grapes in Palestine were (in the south) trailed over heaps of stones, and not on poles.

In due time the spies return. They are terrified by 'cities,' which, too, are 'walled,' and inhabited by giants. Those old Amorites who had cultivated the land, had indeed built cities and walls. The latest investi-

<sup>1</sup> See Numbers xi. 31.

gations show, as at Lachish, how high and thick these walls were, and yet these Israelites must have seen 'walls' in Goshen. They had coward hearts, for now they 'wept.' They expected everything to be done for them, and had no heart for work, except as slaves. But two brave men had not lost heart. Caleb, one of the two, gave inspiring advice. 'We are able to take it,' said he. No!—the mass refused. They absolutely mutinied, and wanted to return to Egypt. No wonder, then, that the awful fiat was given that, save Joshua and Caleb, all should die in the desert. At this, despair took possession of the mutineers, and they presumed to attack the natives of the land. They went without leaders, without blessing, and their presumption was punished by a sore defeat. There is nothing for it but to give some law to this mob, who are not without leaders now, for certain men—jealous as ever vain men are of great leaders—rebel against Moses.

In a great European conflict some years ago, an English officer, before the campaign opened, happened to see the *corps d'élite* reviewed. Afterwards, in conversation with the commanding general, he expressed his admiration of the troops. 'Yes,' said he, 'they drill well. There is, however, one fatal fault; every private, every corporal, thinks he knows as much as his general. I dread what will happen if war breaks out.' His prediction was fulfilled. Ah yes! we may be sure of this, that unless there is obedience, and a loyal sense of duty in soldiers to their superiors, defeat must come. Doubtless there are intelligent soldiers in every army, but the individual soldier must sink his own personality and obey, without flinching, the commands of his officer. The man who fights in the ranks sees only the enemy opposite him.

He knows nothing of the general scheme of the battle. Napoleon once ordered some troops to carry a battery. Said the officer, 'All my men will be killed.' 'Perhaps so,' said the leader; 'but I shall gain the battle and save my army.'

The revolt in the desert is punished. We then hear of an earthquake which swallows up the revolters. No wonder they worshipped Fire in that Eastern land, for extinct volcanoes are everywhere, and traces of earthquake abound.

The host now comes to Kadesh, a place that has been long sought for. To the skill and enterprise of Dr. Trumbull,<sup>1</sup> a celebrated American, the world is indebted for the re-discovery of this oasis—so important, for it was the great turning-point of the whole after affairs of Israel. This place, the oasis, exists. Few, indeed, have seen it. The description, however, of the discoverer puts the matter beyond doubt. It is now marked in the maps. All previous maps were wrong, for they placed it in the Wâdy Arabah, a place the Israelites never visited.

Now the Israelites are quite near the frontiers of the promised land; only the country of Edom bars the way. Offers are made to pay for water—to go on the highway—to do no damage—but Edom refused. They could not force those difficult passes which are known to every traveller—passes where a few resolute men might defy a host. Turn back they must, and go to Mount Hor. The so-called Hor is placed by the maps in the middle of Petra. Now, if Aaron was to be buried in Hor, how comes it that, after Edom had refused the host permission to pass through the land, they were able to bury their second leader in the midst of that land? But there

<sup>1</sup> See *Kadesh-Barnea*, by Dr. Trumbull.

is a mistake, for we see that the Canaanites' king thought they were coming his way, and so fought and took some prisoners. Had the host been going to Petra, their backs would have been to the Canaanite. There is, however, a hill called 'Moderah,' well known to the best travellers, and it is on the border, and fits in with all the Bible statements; and here, probably, is the grave of Aaron. Back the host goes; they cannot get through the hill-country of Edom. So they must go back and 'turn' it. So to the head of the Gulf of Akabah they go. Of all terrible and dreary bits of the desert this is, indeed, the very worst,—the heat is intense, and serpents are common and deadly. It was their 'starvation camp,' different only in this, that there were no trees, no water, nothing but the barren rock and barren sand through the 'way of the Red Sea.' They compass Edom, and the march is through Moab. Here at last their eyes would be gladdened by foliage and pasture. The various stations mentioned can be traced. They are of the usual day's march of the Bedawin apart. The people dig 'wells' for water, or, as we should say, 'ponds.' These were surface springs; they dig them with their 'staves.'

War, and successful war, is now waged. The long pilgrimage is all but over, for on the highlands of Moab the masses halt. These are not the same people who left Egypt. Those had all died in the forty years' wandering; their sons are of stouter hearts, with bodies inured to fatigue by the bracing air of the desert; and so we no longer find them refusing to undergo privations as did their fathers. The latter had been slaves in the brickfields of Egypt; their sons, braced by privations, were of better mettle. What an experience had been theirs! Every one who has lived in the desert

loves it. It has an indescribable charm ; and then, too, what wonders they had seen. They had, by a terrible march, encompassed Edom. The high lands of Moab made them acquainted with streams and trees, and now their eyes are gladdened by the verdure of Canaan, for it was in the spring-time that they first sighted it. What wonderful things they had seen ! Those underground cities of Bashan so planned that no human skill could hope to defeat the inhabitants,—cities which we now can see ; market-places, shops, streets *all* deep down. These cities have here been of late in part surveyed and mapped. They were most skilfully constructed. There were air-holes from those lower streets to the open sky above. We know from the Bible how the invading Israelites conquered these underground cities. Man and his devices would have been useless, so God sent hornets to drive out the people who had tried to take refuge there. This ‘hornet’s nest’ is no new thing to travellers now. In India and Africa, men can tell how troops have been routed by ‘hornets.’ The three points which ever lived in the memory of Moses were the ‘great and terrible wilderness,’ Kadesh-Barnea, and then the conquest of those underground cities of the Amorites—cities so cleverly constructed, so easily defended, that unless the hornets had driven out the people, the invading Israelites would doubtless have failed. Joshua also was much impressed by these fighting wasps as allies to Israel. In later ages—as in the conquest of Algeria by the French—the people retreated to underground caves ; and the French marshal ordered fires to be made so as to suffocate the refugees. It would take too long to relate all the wonders discovered in Moab and Edom ; and that God fought for these desert warriors there can be no

doubt, for they were unskilled in warring against cities ; they had seen in their desert life nothing but tents ; they had no warlike engines, no battering-rams, nothing but their swords and spears.

The whole history of this invasion proves that it was not *only* by the prowess of men that it was successful ; though the Israelites seem to have been ‘good’ at a rush, and their ‘hurrah,’ like that of our own troops, disconcerted more than once the foe. The Moabite king thought that he could better gain a victory by ‘cursing’ the invaders. The points of view to which he took the prophet Balaam can be traced. The positions are so accurately described by the old writer that modern engineer officers find no difficulty in deciding the position ; and strange, too, as it may seem, they—in short, all who travel there—find rude stone altars, menhirs, or upright stones, stone circles, like those curious erections which are found in Cornwall and in Wales called Druid stones. There you have unhewn slabs placed up on end ; they support a huge flat slab, which always slopes to the setting or rising sun, and often has a cup hollowed in it. Some little distance away you get a circle of stones, and always near a brook or stream. You can see the exact counterparts in Wales, and those in Moab are probably the very altars this old heathen king erected. Oxen, and often men, were sacrificed, and the cup-shaped hollow was to collect the blood of the victim that was sprinkled by the priests on the assembly. But all the efforts of the king of Moab failed. He was defeated, and his prophet slain.

Now close to the promised land the host comes. Endless have been their adventures. They were not a ‘model’ people, and they were then, as now, a difficult people to

manage. Can you think of Moses without pity? All the cares, all the anxiety of this people had been on him from the days when, giving up his kingly position in Pharaoh's court, he became a shepherd in Midian; and now after all these long and weary years, he is not to enter the land! From a high hill he sees it. From that very range we can look on the landscape he saw—the Jordan, the frontier he was not to cross; and so



MOUNT NEBO.

dying on a mountain alone, he is buried by the Lord. Had it really been known where Moses was buried, afterwards would have probably erected a statue to him, or put up a monument. His grave cannot be that Moslem tomb in the Judean desert which, perched high on a barren hill, is visited every year by pious Moslems. They, as well as a good many other people, are not very exact as

to 'sites,' for Moses died in Moab, and this tomb is on the western bank of Jordan.

This man Moses really founded all the law and order as at present existing in the world—altered and modified, it may be. But this leader of the Jews has laid down codes of law which every civilised nation of to-day follows. There have been great men since, but none whose precepts have had such universal acceptance ; and he did it not in his own strength,—an inspired man, he ever referred all to God. You may find in the circles of society men who deny God ; but when you find a great leader of men, a great explorer or traveller—you find they all are influenced by the deepest feelings of our nature that there is a Maker. To the Bible we owe it that we can call that Maker 'Father.' A Father once, a Father always, however erring or sinning the son.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LAND OF PROMISE

JOSHUA i.-xiv. ; JUDGES i.-ii.

The Passing of Jordan—Joshua—Jericho Taken—Ai—The Gibeonites—The Conquest of the Land—The People of Canaan—The Hittites—Caleb.

THE goal, the end of all the weary pilgrimage, is now in sight. The man who led first the coward race and then their stouter-hearted sons is not, however, to tread the new land. The lawgiver's task done, now comes the soldier Joshua, a man who had been trained in Egyptian warfare, who had been the chosen fighter in many a hard-won battle: he now takes first rank. The work of the sword is to commence in earnest; they had but brushed away the opposition of Moab. Now in sight of the river, which was the eastern frontier, they pause. The Jordan, famous in all the after-history of the Israelites, is a very disappointing river. As children we think of it as a huge stream, its water clear. In reality it is a rapid, noisy, dirty 'burn.' Its water carries with it the *débris* from the melted snows of Hermon, and the mud from its cliffs which are ever falling in. It has no town on its banks, and never, as does the Nile, overflows to fertilise the land; its 'banks,' which are three in number, are all it fertilises. In the hot weather it overflows its narrow bed and makes the third 'bank,' forming a lagoon,

to which flock birds in multitudes, and where tangled shrubs grow, giving safe refuge to wild boar or leopard; its taste is sweet and delicious, as are all streams from snow. The one river of Palestine, it was ever the sacred river.

Joshua shows he has learnt war, for, like a prudent general, he does not make the mistake of underrating the enemy. He sends spies; but the enemy had watched the fords, had seen the men, and had tracked them to Rahab's house. Her wit saves the men. We see what the time of year was, for flax was ripe. On the flat-roofed house the stalks were laid out to dry. This house was built on the wall, which would be of sun-dried bricks. The old 'Tells,' *i.e.* heaps of ruins, in the Jordan valley prove this. The wall was doubtless of great strength and thickness, for Jericho was the key of the passes from the fords. Walls twenty-five feet thick have been found in these ruined 'Tells.' The gates would be of wood, and plated with iron. Rahab was a dyer, for she gives the spies a scarlet thread. This shows that Babylonian knowledge was prevalent in the Jordan valley. Hearsay had told all the wonders of the Exodus. The Jericho of Joshua's day was not on the same site as the Jericho of the New Testament. The old city would be close to the hills, and they abound in caves. It would not be difficult to hide scores of men in these, let alone two.

By a miracle the host had left Egypt. By another they cross the river. 'Adam,' by 'Zaretan,' is thought to be a bend in the river near Beisan, for 'Adam' means red earth, and at the point mentioned there is a stream, the name of which in Arabic means 'red river.' It is not improbable that there was an earthquake or landslip which dammed up the Jordan for a time. The people



JERICHO AND JORDAN PLAIN.

crossed ; to them, unaccustomed to streams, this Jordan would look large.

The 'angel's food' now ceased, because the land they had entered had food enough and to spare. Jericho is besieged, and strict watch is kept over the gates of the city. With the men Joshua had at his disposal, this would be an easy task, for the 'city' could never have been a large one. One has to modify many of one's ideas when one visits the Holy Land, which is limited in extent. We are not told the number of the inhabitants. All we know is that the 'walls' fell down. Here again, probably, an earthquake shook these dried mud walls down, and the disheartened people could not stand against the desert warriors. A man of Israel was tempted by rich dresses, gold, and silver ; he took them, and hid them ; but judgment followed. We know from the records of the Egyptian conquest before this time how rich were the inhabitants of Canaan. No wonder, then, that in this city such rich spoil was found. This poor man had not realised the mission he and his fellows had been given. He could not rise to the height of the thought that they, these pilgrims of the *désert*, were to be agents in the hands of the Almighty God to chastise the sins of the people of the land. Poor fellow ! let us not be hard on him. For years he had lived a desert life, with scanty clothing, and now close to hand is a rich dress, gold and silver. He did wrong, and suffered for his sin.

There is another city, Ai, and this again is so situated that it commands the pass from Jericho to the interior. What war of words there has been as to the site of this ! Ai commanded what we now know as Wâdy Kelt, a deep pass which leads from Jericho to the centre of the land.

As military men would say, it was the 'key,' therefore it must be taken. Defeat followed the first attack ; but Joshua brought overwhelming forces to bear, and with military skill, too. He makes flank movements ; he makes false attacks ; he neglects nothing. The result is victory. We know nothing more until we find Joshua at Ebal.

The taking of these strongholds had crushed the enemy. So from Ai he would march by easy roads to Ebal. Then, too, he must, as a prudent general, replenish his stores, which by this time would be running short. He had obtained plenty in the Jordan valley ; but Easterns are ever improvident, and will eat and drink to-day, little thinking that in all probability they will starve to-morrow. Now again, at Ebal, Joshua gets possession of a rich, central, corn-growing country. From thence he can attack or defend, as may be. It is a fine strategic position, and shows still more clearly that this invasion of the Israelites was conducted on a sound military basis. It was *not* haphazard work which made them conquer ; they were led by a man of genius. The question may, however, occur, How is it that Joshua had only to meet a confederacy of kinglets or sheikhs ? Why, the great power of the Hittite nation had been shattered by the Egyptians during the time of bondage. Inscriptions in plenty tell us of the hard-fought battles, which the Egyptian forces had waged in Syria. We even have the account of the travels of an Egyptian officer, who went as far north as Aleppo in a chariot. The roads must have been better kept then than now. He has various adventures ; his clothes are stolen ; he visits most of the well-known Biblical cities ; he notes a 'ford' on the Jordan ; he sees Joppa ; by careless driving his chariot is broken, and he goes to a village smithy to have it repaired. The whole

story is most exact and interesting, and proves how great was Egyptian influence in Canaan just before Joshua. Bear in mind that Joshua had no warlike engines, that the places he had to take were 'walled,' and then you will understand the history of the attack on Ai. The site has been discovered, and the Arabic name—Haiyân—carries on the old Hebrew one.

But Joshua gets outwitted by a lie. Men come to him with tattered clothing and mouldy bread, looking worn out. They glibly say they have heard in a far-away land of the wondrous events attending the advance of these Israelites; they wish to make a covenant, they would be content to be servants, and all they want is peace! The frank and true soldier is trapped by these politicians. Really their home was a hill not far away, which commanded the passes to west and south-west. It is called a 'royal city,' but not many people could have lived in it. It had other villages which owned its ruler, and its sheikh was a shrewd man, who wanted to be on the winning side. Three short days and the spies discover the abode of these 'far away' people; but the submission of this hill-city brings about a critical time. The kinglets around determine to crush the one who has dared to make peace with the invader. They gather a host. But their weak point was that they had no central head; their forces had never worked together; and not for the first or last time in history do we find that numbers do not necessarily make strength.

These 'kings' crowd their men against Gibeon, filling the passes and the plains. Far away on the plains of Jericho, at Gilgal, rests Joshua. He hears of the assembly, and receives an urgent request from the Gibeonites for help. By a night march through the Wâdy Kelt he

presses on with a picked force, and when morning breaks he is well on the flank of the confederacy. They were cramped for room. When one goes to the place, one sees how lifelike all the description is, how the ground bears out to the very letter the old writer's brief account. Not only have they to meet the attack of the Amorites, but also one of those storms which even now are common in Palestine. Joshua returns to his central camp, Gilgal, but soon sets out again with a flying column. Like a wise general he does not take the mass, the non-combatants. He marches westwards. The site of 'Makkedah' has been discovered; 'Libnah' also, probably so called from its white cliffs, and Lachish. All three cities are captured. Now he turns south, near the Great Sea; then come Eglon and Hebron, that old and famous city, then 'Debir,' the book or university town, and all fall before him, as well as the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, even to 'Kadesh-Barnea.'

These Israelites in this great march would be going through a country to which they, by their desert training, were accustomed. It is now a land of sand-hills and heat, abounding in ruins; a land given over to the wandering Bedawin, who will not enter these deserted cities, believing them to be the abode of 'Jinns'—they are 'uncanny.' Many a ruined town in this 'south' country proves how great at one time was the population. This flying column of Joshua's for the *time* cleared the way west and south; but the raid over, we know that many of the people came back and reinhabited the towns; therefore, it would seem that it was only those people in the *towns* or walled villages which were 'put to the sword.' We must not think of this foray, though the men were 'picked men,' as being like a European army. They



MAP OF PALESTINE.

had no warlike engines to convey over bad roads. They had no powder supply to care for, no tents, and no commissariat. These old armies were a militia, a levy *en masse*; armed with swords, spears, bows and arrows—the archery was a great force. Probably the Hebrews copied this arm from the Egyptians, who were great archers, and it was while in Egypt that Joshua had learnt war.

After this march we see that again Joshua returned to Gilgal to refit and reform. It was time, for now from the north comes an alarm. Various sheikhs band together. The places named are all north, and are all identified. Easterns were never accurate as to numbers, and they are the same to this day. In their poetic language they say the forces gathered ‘were as the sand that is on the sea-shore in multitude;’ in our English, that means there was a great host. This new foe had horses and chariots; the Israelites had none. Horses and chariots being mentioned prove again that it was a remnant of the great Hittite kingdom which now tried to stop the invader. Joshua was told to burn the chariots and destroy the horses as usual. At the waters of Merom they had gathered. These waters are now called Baheiret el Hûleh, which is about eight miles long and six broad, fed, of course, by the Jordan, and flowing out to the sea of Galilee. There is ample space on its shores for a host such as described. It may, again, have been a night attack, but in either case the defeat was complete, so much so that the pursuit continued to Zidon, that parent city of the Phœnicians on the sea-coast. Misrephoth-Maim (‘Burnings’) is thought to be the place where glass was made. We do not read that Joshua attacked the Phœnicians. Those old-world mariners were the carriers for all the nations. Their art was poor; all they

cared for was a 'port' where they could put up their ships and sell or barter their goods; and so, bartering Egyptian glass, it came about that they discovered a way of making it for themselves; and the fable runs that the melting of the sands on the shore near Zidon gave the idea for glass. We now know and can prove that glass was made in Egypt long, long before. Perfect specimens of the most delicate glass vessels have been found in Thebes and elsewhere in Egypt.

Those who opposed Joshua he fought and destroyed. Those that did not, 'but stood still,' he left; he was too brave to be cruel. Has it ever occurred to you that, to put it in plain English, the conduct of Joshua was bloodthirsty? 'He smote every man with the edge of the sword.' It must suffice to say, what ample records prove, that these nations had indeed filled up the cup of iniquity to the full. Their religious rites were bloodthirsty; their so-called 'priests' foul livers; their conduct to women too degrading to speak of; and as for children—let one example suffice. They at feasts were put into a leathern bag, and thrown from the highest points of the temples to the mob below, and this in the name of religion! Men had lost their manhood, women their chastity. The whole state of society was rotten to the core, and too terrible to dilate on. No wonder that He, the Maker of the whole earth, Whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity, could no longer bear with His rebellious children; and so the Israelites are sent as a scourge to them, a lesson and a warning to all time that God *does* rule, and that, though He is long-suffering, and forbearing, yet peoples, nations, and individuals work out their own doom.

The hilly country under Hermon cost Joshua a long

time. In those wild regions the forces he could employ would be but small, and it would be hill warfare. There were no 'special correspondents' in those days, so we cannot read of the toilsome marches, the dreary camps, the burning heat, the want of provisions. Yet all this must have been endured, for 'Joshua made long war.' What does this mean but that he had difficult work cut out for him? Go over this very ground now, and you will understand what that short passage means. Barren tracts, all but impassable ravines—sometimes blocked by snow; positions which a few brave men could defend against a host; all this had to be met in that campaign in the hills. Then follows an account in detail of the people and the cities taken; but note that in the Philistine plain three cities—Gaza, Gath, Ashdod—are not taken; we shall see the reasons later on. And now there is rest from war. Joshua paused, because the work given him to do was done. He was now old, no longer fit for active service in the field. But the whole land is not conquered; much, as we see, was still held by the Canaanites. But human strength could not hold out, and a commander-in-chief in those days had to share the privations and the toils of the youngest soldier. All had to be done under his own eye; it was owing to his courage and strong belief in the God who had led his host out of slavery and through the desert wanderings, that he had been the chosen leader in the career of conquest.

If you desire to get a true impression of the conquest of Canaan, you must read the Book of Joshua with the help of a good map, otherwise the list of thirty-one 'kings' will lead you to think that the land was of great extent. Really these 'kings' were petty sheikhs ruling

each over his little hill, for almost all the 'cities' were built on hills, partly for health's sake, for in a hot country they would there get the cool breezes; and, again, these hill positions were chosen because they were more secure. The great Hittite nation which held sway in Canaan while Israel was captive in Egypt, had been shattered. Had they existed in their full power, the Israelites would have been unable to conquer them, but the affairs of men and nations are in the hands of a Ruler. And so Egypt really prepared the way for Israel.

One of the most interesting of recent discoveries is that of the empire of the Hittites: Dr. Wright and Professor Sayce have written of these people and of an empire great as Egypt or Assyria. They left their traces in the names of towns such as Kirjath-sepher, or 'book-town,' also known as Debir, 'the sanctuary.' These Hittites were a people possessing a literature and a system of writing all their own. Some of the sculptures from Carchemish, their capital, can be seen in the British Museum. The Biblical historians are the only writers who mention them. Seven years ago no one dreamed that those stray allusions recorded a great people. They are mentioned in Judges i. 26; 1 Kings x. 28, 29; and 2 Kings vii. 6; and when David numbered the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. 6. His officers went as far as 'Gilead and the land of the Hittites of Kadesh,' for that is the real meaning of 'Tahtim-hodshi.' The Hebrew text is there corrupt; the Septuagint gives the true passage: 'B.C. 717 Sargon captured their rich capital, Carchemish, and made it the seat of an Assyrian satrap.' Then they disappear from history.

Let us consider the character of another man, Caleb. What a brave old warrior was he! Forty years old when sent by Moses as a spy from Kadesh-Barnea, he

had gone through all the fights, and he had done his work well. He was of the stuff of which Cromwell's Ironsides were made. He loved war. He is now eighty-five; strong as ever—keen as ever. He knows there is one place difficult to take. 'Let me do it!' says this old hero. Who could refuse him? Certainly not Joshua, his old friend, and the only one who, like himself, in those early days at Kadesh, had not lost heart. We heard nothing of the campaign; but we may be sure this old chief led his men to quick and sure victory. He had an eagle's eye for war. Walls! they daunted him not. Difficulties! well, like all brave men he said they were only things to be overcome. Danger! he loved it, and yet he was ever prudent. One town tried him—a hilly city on a ridge—a strong position, as we now can see. So, like a prudent man, he calls for volunteers who will lead a forlorn hope. He offers no commission, for he knew a more powerful bribe: he has a daughter. 'I will give her to wife to the man who takes Debir,' says he. Probably he knew well the lover the girl had—knew him as a Bayard among his fellows, and yet, a chief, he does not like to give his daughter to a 'common man.' Love wins the way—it ever will. A stout heart and a brave hand, inspired by love, gave the city to Othniel. He gains his wife. She was a double prize, for we see at once, chief's daughter as she was, that she was practical. This hill-city might be strong, healthy, but how about water? This woman had not despised to enter into the details of household works and wants. She knew well that in the 'south,' water was of the uttermost importance: she begs the 'springs.' Her fond father grants her request. We find that town—we find those springs still existing.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE JUDGES

JUDGES iv.-xii.

Deborah--The Death of Sisera--Gideon--Abimelech--Jephthah.

OTHER judges have the people, men of valour, who for a time seemed to stem the downward steps of the Israelites. There is, however, one great event which stands out from the crowd of petty combats, and the honour belongs to a woman. The events are related both in prose and poetry, and, as we can always learn so much from the songs of nations, it will be well to give this famous song some attention. We see from the two accounts that the Northern kings, whose power had been shattered by Joshua at Merom, had again consolidated their forces. They have chariots of iron and horsemen. The Israelites have submitted to their sway for twenty years, and then suddenly we are introduced to Deborah,—her home was under a well-known palm-tree in Mount Ephraim. Near Kadesh-Naphtali lives a partisan leader, Barak. Kadesh means ‘holy,’ and Barak ‘lightning.’ He would appear to have been the Robin Hood of his time. His home was an important place, as the ruins of Kadesh prove, situated on a hill which slopes to the east. Its neighbouring hills give pasture to flocks.

At the foot of the hills is a fertile strip of marsh land, while a fine spring gives abundant water. The prophetess orders Barak to Mount Tabor, and he is to take ten thousand of the hillmen of Naphtali and Zebulun. He declines to obey unless accompanied by the woman. The warrior wishes his men to be inspired by this well-known prophetess. Women are usually thought of little account in the East, yet, in times of danger, they always come to the front and urge the men to the noblest deeds. In after ages the magic example of the peasant girl of France roused her soldiers to battle once more with the English invader. Deborah consents to go, at the same time foretelling that the chief honour shall not fall to the commander, but to a woman. The rest of the prose story may be passed over while we examine the song.

The first verses sung by soldier and priestess ascribe all praise to the Lord God of Israel. The past is recalled—the past of glory and deliverance. Then comes the contrast: there is no king, no law. The result is given in the statement of universal fear and confusion. ‘The highways are unoccupied;’ ‘travellers walk along the byeways;’ ‘the villages are forsaken.’ In their trouble the foolish people forget the Lord God Who had led their forefathers through greater trials than those the people had now to bear. In their folly they turn to ‘new gods,’ though there was war at the very ‘gates’ of their hill-villages, and war found them unarmed. ‘Dumb, driven cattle’ are the men till the ‘mother’ Deborah arose. Her inspiring call had revived hope; it had called the leaders of the people to her mission; those that ‘ride on white asses’ (the religious leaders), those, also, who ‘sit on rich carpets’ (the judges), and the common people are all invited, and all respond, and are thanked. It was a

national uprising, and the immediate result was that the enemy recalls his forces; villages are delivered from the bands of archers who had annoyed and harassed the people at the wells. In peace the people can go down to the 'gates' of their cities and chant the praises of the Lord. This, the first-fruits of the great uprising, is hailed in triumphal song.

Now, the chant is addressed to Barak; he is summoned to take the lead of those who have been captive; he is exalted above all the leaders. From Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, pour forth both leaders and people, but not from all the tribes. Why Judah, 'the lion,' is absent we are not told. The weakness of Israel was ever that tribal division. Each tribe thought too much of its own welfare. Judah, himself untouched by the oppression of Jabin, had no care for his brethren. Reuben debated; talked the matter over by the camp fires, listening to the bleating of their sheep, and so their ears were dulled, and they could not hear the cry of their oppressed and suffering kinsmen. Great was the debate, but it 'ended in talk.' Gilead, a race of warriors, were across Jordan, and so felt not the patriotic wave. Dan, safe in her ships on the coasts, traded and slept. Asher rested in the havens on the sea-coast. Selfishness ruled these tribes, and now from the picture of indifference the prophetess turns her gaze to those who risked all, those who bravely thought that

'Though death was a terrible thing,  
Yet a shamed life was a hateful.'

The hostile host is camped at Megiddo; they had been 'drawn' from their stronghold of 'Harosheth.' This Megiddo was near the well-known springs of Kishon, looking



MOUNT TABOR.

across the plain of Esdraelon, where the chariots might be expected to act effectively. Thirteen miles away lay Mount Tabor, from which Barak could watch the movements of the foe. He sees the fatal mistake they have made fighting with a river in their rear. Taking advantage of a furious squall of wind and hail which, driving over Tabor, would fall full on the faces of the enemy, the footmen of Barak rush to the attack; infantry only, they rush to attack cavalry and chariots, for their leader has seen the disorder caused by the storm; the biting cold and hail numbed the swordsmen and disabled the archers of Sisera's forces. The frightened horses plunged wildly, terrified by the storm, which is so terrific that the poetic fancy of Deborah compares it to the 'stars in their courses:' an allusion, probably, to the great star-showers of the winter months. Soon the river Kishon and all its feeders are in 'spate,' overflowing all the low-lying marsh lands. The prancing of the horses, the desperate efforts of the chief to restore order, do but increase the confusion; flight is the only thing thought of, but flight was impossible; the marshes and quicksands of Kishon swallow up the fugitives, and the defeat is complete. Some few years ago it was our fate to encounter near this very spot a storm of hail with thunder and lightning. In a few moments the Kishon, which on calm days is but a small brook, became a mighty torrent stream, into which the frightened horses plunged madly. The sandy shore, usually so firm, was a quicksand which all but engulfed us, while from the sky poured down hailstones of huge size, and the furious wind drove these hailstones with such force, that we and our men had difficulty to protect our eyes from injury; and when we did cross, after the squall had subsided, it was by swimming the horses, while

the footmen waded breast-high holding on by the stirrup-leathers. Had we been pursued by any enemy, death would have been the fate of all our party.

One city—Meroz—is especially noted in the Song: a curse is pronounced against it, for it, like many of the tribes, was unpatriotic. We can judge what its fate was. Its name never again reappears in Holy Writ.

The war-song now leaves the battlefield to describe the tents of a single Bedawy—a man descended from Hobah, who, at Moses' request, was the 'eyes,' the guide to Israel when in the desert of Sinai. Hobah had severed his connection with his tribe, and had cast in his lot with the people of Israel. His descendant, Heber, a prudent man, had kept his own counsel, so that Sisera, knowing that he was not of Israelitish blood, thought that in defeat he would find safe refuge in the black tents. Heber was away from home, probably with Barak, but his wife, Jael, 'the chamois,' was taking charge of the tents. The beaten leader is utterly exhausted by his long flight on foot, for, seeing the confusion of his chariot corps, he had sought for safety in the uplands. He craves water. The woman has met him with all due respect to his rank and position; she gives him not water, but 'butter in a lordly dish.' This would be 'lubban,' sour butter-milk, which every Bedawy of to-day would drink after great fatigue; it wards off fever, and induces sleep,—moreover, it is a dish only offered to a favoured guest.

In a few moments Sisera was asleep; then swiftly, tent-peg and hammer in hand, Jael drives the iron nail with fierce energy into the temples of the sleeping man. Barak, who had not lost sight of the flying general, arrives at this juncture, and the dead body is shown to him.

Reading this, we must remember the opening words of

the story, 'that every one did what was right in his own eyes;' it is right that we should condemn the murder, but we must remember the times were savage and the oppression had been great.

The point of view is now shifted again, and we see what victory for Sisera would have meant. We are now taken to the palace-home of Sisera's mother. She sits in state in the harem, her attendant ladies around; wonder is expressed at the delay in the arrival of the general's chariot, but the thoughts of all are that the victory has been so complete, and the spoils so great, that therefore the homeward progress must be slow. Woman-like they talk of needlework, but also that every man would have 'a damsel or two.' Bear in mind that Jael well knew what would have been the fate of every Israelitish woman had Barak failed, and you then see what nerved her arm. No pity is expressed by these courtly ladies at the fate of their sisters; not a word of regret is said as this group look out from the lattice or balcony window from the strong castle. With true artistic skill, the poetess tells not of the awakening when the news of the terrible disaster did reach their ears; but the closing words ascribe glory to the Lord, and the pregnant words, 'The land had rest forty years,' tell their own tale.

As a direct punishment for sin another invader disturbs the Israelites. This time the enemy comes from the East, the land of Midian, people we now call Bedawin; their location is the great belt of country from the Euphrates to the Red Sea, and all the great low-lying pasture-land in the Tigris Valley, that country where now exist the Moslem sacred cities, Mecca and Medinah. Wild raiders, accustomed to border war, they always migrated in the spring time to find pasture for their flocks and herds.

So when the land is green they come in multitudes and eat up the grassy crops. They care not for the destruction, for they come not to stay, only to tide over a few months—careless of the starvation which the people of the land must suffer afterwards. In the wild mountain ranges, in the numberless caverns and holes in the limestone ridges, the Israelites hide themselves, and it does not appear that these mounted Bedawin cared to hunt them out, for they covered all the plain, even to Gaza, that strong city low down on the maritime plain close to the Egyptian frontiers. Even to this very day Bedawin live and roam in that Gaza plain. No one cares to meddle with them; they are like a cloud of wasps, which men are only anxious to leave alone. When the late Khedive of Egypt was asked why he did not restrain the lawlessness of the Bedawin on one part of his frontier, his answer was, ‘Why, if I touched one tribe I should have a cloud of enemies attacking my whole frontier; better leave them alone.’ The flocks of these invaders were so immense that the sacred writer compares their advance to that terrible plague, the locust, which destroys every green thing. True, these Bedawin no longer raid Palestine, but their absence is quite of recent date; and even now in the country near Babylon can be seen the usual migration of the tribes, the whole country covered by camels, sheep, goats, and horses; and when they leave their camp, nothing but the parched and barren ground is to be seen. Starvation came near to the Israelites, and then they remembered their God. Again they are reminded of their past, and of the promises, and that if they forbore to serve idols they need not fear.

The Amorites or hillmen were the especial dread of the Israelites, for those people were mountaineers, and could follow the fugitives into the hill refuges. At such a time

Gideon comes suddenly to the front. Secretly he is beating out corn, not on the hill-top, where the threshing-floors were placed, but in the low-lying wine-press, a confined space. This shows how little corn he had to thresh out, and that it was only dire hunger that made him do it; for he had a reputation as a mighty man of valour, he had doubtless taken a prominent part in border warfare, and had been victorious over the straggling parties of the foe. A believer in the Lord, yet he is puzzled. If we are to be delivered into the hands of Midian, why were we brought out of Egypt, is the cry? The past history of his race was not unknown to him. Although his father was poor, yet that father had taught him of the great deliverance. Modest as are all great men, he speaks of himself as the 'least' of his father's house. When the Lord talks of Gideon's 'might,' the modest man looks into his own heart and is ashamed. True, then as now, it is not the braggarts who do the work of the world. In our own day examples crop up even again and again of this modesty. Witness the lives of Grant, of Garfield, of our own brave Nelson in the past, and many others. Gideon, still misgiving, asks for a 'sign,' which is granted, and then the strong man hesitates no longer, the foul idols of the grove are to be cut down, and the wood devoted to burn the favourite bullock. Gideon has influence with his men, they knew and trusted him; so secretly, and by night, ten men and Gideon cut down the grove,<sup>1</sup> overthrow the altar of Baal, and on a new altar to Jehovah the bullock is offered. It is impossible to speak openly of what history teaches us about the foul rites and worship of those deities, Astoreth and Baal. As to the female deities,

<sup>1</sup> A figure of a tree carved in wood, which was considered sacred to certain gods among the Canaanites and Assyrians.

their worship was that of foulness, and their rites were too scandalous to relate. Cruelty on the part of the male devotees was only equalled by their sensuality. Their worship was filthy; they had no morals, and taught none. All their sacrifices were impure, or cruel, they defiled the land; and they delighted in the sacrifice of children. The child or children were put into the hands of a brass statue, which had been previously heated, and when the poor victim fell out of the hands of the idol it was but to fall into the furnace at its feet. Why, even later on in the history of Paganism, the Pelasgians offered up a tenth of their children, and in the Crimea every shipwrecked person was sacrificed to Diana; even Rome annually threw thirty men into the Tiber, or burned men alive, that prosperity might come to the city. You will recall that in the siege of Carthage three hundred citizens were burnt, and at another time all the captives were burned alive. In Egypt, Manetho, an Egyptian chronicler, says one thousand were sacrificed every year. Is this brief story not enough to enable us to see what the foul gods of the heathen were? and do we wonder then why Joshua and all the other leaders were so determined to destroy these 'priests,' and their altars and worship? This, too, enables us to understand what otherwise would be a puzzle and a seeming contradiction, that God, Who is ever represented as a God of mercy, should command the Israelites to destroy these idolaters, and forbade the Israelites, under the direst threats of punishment, ever to serve the gods of the land. 'The iniquity of the Amorites' was now 'full.' And yet, such is poor, sinful human nature, that these very Israelites, who had been brought out of such great trouble, with such a mighty hand, fell, and, grovelling in the dirt, served and worshipped these sensual gods.

Sensuality ever brings its own punishment. Then it brought death and ruin; now it brings death, and ruins body and soul too. The verdict may be delayed, but it is delivered.

‘ Though the mills of God grind slowly,  
Yet they grind exceeding small.’

The men of the city and of the household are furious when they see the destruction of the idols; they insist that Joash shall deliver up his son, Gideon, that he may be offered a sacrifice to appease Baal and Astoreth. The father pertinently enough remarks, if Baal is a god, let him look after his own interests; and the disputants think this the wiser course, and leave Gideon alone: not the first time a man’s life has been saved by ready wit.

Ophrah, where Gideon lived, is a place not far from Dothan, a fertile district; a village on a hill still marks its site. From this the invaders pass on to the plain or Valley of Jezreel, also a most fertile spot—a position which would give them the rich pasture-lands of the plains of Esdraelon, and also an easy route back to the Jordan fords. It would seem by this gathering in Jezreel that the invaders were collecting their scattered forces in order to return to their own land, for Jezreel is on the way to one of the best of the Jordan fords. So just when gorged with victory, the crisis of their fate is approaching—but we must not anticipate.

Gideon now lifts up the standard; inspired by God, he boldly takes the field, and summons help from the tribes. At the darkest hour the dawn is near. Another sign is given to Gideon, and full of high courage he assembles his men, with their camp near the spring of Harod, which still exists. This well lies at the foot of the mountains of Gilboa. And up the steep ascents of that mountain

chain we may picture to ourselves the gathering forces of the Israelites, while hard by, on the lower ground, is the mass of the invaders, with their fattened host of cattle, on their way home. Not to have any cowards in his army, Gideon sifted the people. Twenty-two thousand left him, and he had ten thousand remaining. A further test is applied. Had the first number stayed they would have said, in case of victory, that it was their own strength that had saved them; so now, this new test is, Who is self-restrained and temperate? The men are taken to the water in companies, those who drank out of their hands were but three hundred: the others put their lips to the stream. Any one who has seen Easterns drink, in that hot and thirsty land, will see at once the force of the difference of posture. The mass drank without stint. Those men not able to restrain their appetites would be worse than useless. But three hundred remain; the rest are sent away.

And now the prudent Gideon (God-inspired as are all great leaders of men; for, remember, God is still working, still leading men, He has not left the world alone to work out its own destiny; men may say what they like, all things are directed, and in the hands of Him Who slumbers not nor sleeps)—Gideon, with one trusty servant, goes down to the Bedawin host to spy. They find the host scattered abroad, and here comes in quite a bit of Eastern description: the men are like ‘grasshoppers for multitude,’ the camels without number, ‘like the sand by the sea-shore.’ No Eastern has ever had a definite conception of numbers. Their poetic language knows not the rigid bounds of figures, and so all this simply means that there was a great overcrowding of the plain of Jezreel. It was not unknown to the invaders that the

Israelites had plucked up heart, that they were under the guidance of a skilful captain, and the terror of the Lord had affrighted the host. A dreamer tells his dream, and foretells disaster. This story overheard by Gideon strengthens him still more. See what trust he had, for of his three hundred men not one had a sword—he had the only one. See, too, how well he understood the invaders; how well he had studied their habits, their loose watch. Their heavy sleep was not unnoticed by him. Like every great commander he thought nothing ‘trivial.’ So he divides his men into three bands, 100 in each, each man having an empty pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet. They hide their lamps in the pitcher; silently they go round to the two flanks and the rear; then, in the middle watch, just when the new watch were placed, sleepy, unaccustomed to the gloom, with eyes but half-opened, they are startled by the blast of the three hundred trumpets. They see the glare of three hundred lamps. Flanks and rear are all attacked; and as they are confused in the darkness, knowing not friend from foe, they attack each other. The one thought in common is to make for the fords at Bethshemesh, low down in the Jordan valley, and so, hurrying down, the invaders, a wild confused mass, are attacked by the Israelites, who swarm out of the hills of Naphtali, and all the adjoining country. Gideon, forgetful of nothing, sends messengers warning the tribes to take possession of the fords. The wild rout goes on, the invading leaders are taken on the other side Jordan, in the east country. Their heads were laid before Gideon, who, with his three hundred men, ‘faint but pursuing,’ had yet held on. He, the victorious leader, has, in the moment of victory, to listen to the envious speeches of men of Ephraim, who now can ‘chide’ him! What a childish

race; how jealous were these people—gratitude was unknown to them. Boastful and proud in victory, but cowards in danger. One can but admire the temperate answer of the great leader. Hungry as his men are, yet Gideon is denied food by the ‘princes’ or sheikhs of Succoth, who are not quite sure if the cause is won. Trimmers, they see spots in the sun, and they say, You have not yet got the two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna—we stand aside. The just anger of Gideon blazes out. When I have conquered those kings, says he, I will teach you, and with thorns and briars in your flesh you shall know who I am. Cowards, too, and insolent are the men of Penuel, which was a town in the wilderness, on the way to the uplands, where the remnants of the invaders are fleeing. Gideon foretells the destruction of that town. From the mention of the town of Succoth and the town at Penuel, it would prove that the invaders had contented themselves with ‘eating up the land,’ and had not made war on the towns; in their vast numbers they despised the townspeople and the refugees of the towns. They had not come to stay, as we before remarked.

The two kings had reached Karkor in the Hauran. The acting commanders, Oreb and Zeeb, ‘the raven’ and ‘the wolf,’ had paid the death-penalty already. Fifteen thousand men out of one hundred and thirty-five thousand were all that remained of the invading host. To show how names are carried on in Bible lands, the probable spot where Oreb was slain is a conical peak, still called ‘Raven’s Nest,’ far up in the Lejjah. The kings and the remnants of these men now thought themselves safe, but Gideon relaxed not his pursuit, urged on by the determination of punishing the men who had murdered his brothers at Tabor; his anger was so fierce, that he wished his young

son to slay the two kings; the lad refused, and Gideon was the avenger of blood. In such a wild scene of battle and slaughter, it is pleasant to see a touch of kind-heartedness. Jether, Gideon's son, sickens at the thought that he, a youth, should slay the two captive kings: he was not fitted for these wild times. Later on he fell a victim to Abimelech, his half-brother, when that leader slew all the sons of Gideon but one.

We are next told of the great spoil of golden earrings. These Bedawin were just like our own gypsies, the men affecting earrings. We must remember that these wanderers always show their wealth by their personal adornments. Houses they have none: tents and their furniture cost little, and so to this day we find that a wealthy Bedawy has his possessions in flocks and herds, and in rich dresses and golden rings. We have seen in a poor hut a rude box opened, and costly garments, necklaces of great price, and rings—nose or ear—tossed out on the earthen floor, dresses which cost, so we were told, quite £60 sterling, crumpled up with the jewels without arrangement or care. The wife of one sheikh had her head covered with gold coins, some of great value, while her necklaces were of rare antique beads of amber or precious stones, and yet her everyday garments were of the poorest and simplest. It is no uncommon thing to find a perfect crowd of bracelets on the very common women. The uncertainty of their homes, their ever-wandering habits, make them store their wealth in a very portable shape. With us Westerns riches are displayed in houses, furniture, and servants—not so with the Bedawin.

Great was the spoil of gold, besides 'crescents'—ornaments such as were afterwards worn by Jewish ladies.

Still does the crescent ornament adorn the trappings of riding camels owned by rich sheikhs, and is even present in the gold or silver chains worn by women of the tribes. Rich garments of 'purple' or scarlet, too, are in the spoil,—traces of Babylonian influence. These Midianites had come from those plains of Mesopotamia. Scarlet dresses are still worn by sheikhs as one of the emblems of rank. Those who have seen the rich dresses of modern sheikhs can picture to themselves how imposing these royal captives must have looked, the bright sun flashing on the scarlet robes. It recalls to our mind a visit once received from three of the principal sheikhs of Moab who wished to induce us to travel in their country. They had put on their robes of state—scarlet and gold were the prevailing tints—which, contrasting with the swarthy faces and fine active figures, made them look 'kings' indeed.

Riches were a snare to the strong man Gideon, and after his death the ungrateful people remembered not the deliverance wrought by him: worse still, they again forgot God and went back to Baal. They returned to their style of foul living, and readily listened to the crafty Abimelech, who pointed out the advantages of the one-man rule—that was himself—to the rule of the seventy. Probably there may have been some truth in the argument, for how could seventy rule? And so, for gain, 'vain and light fellows' slay the crowd of rulers, and only one escapes, and he has to hide, but not for long. Abimelech, the base-born son of Gideon (for his mother was but a captive slave), holds court by the 'oak of the Pillar.' At the place from which Joshua had addressed Israel, *the king* Abimelech stands, the first *king* of Israel. His triumph is disturbed by a voice from the heights above the assembled host. From Gerizim, or from one

of its spurs, a voice is heard like as in a whispering gallery (any word spoken on Gerizim can be heard in the valley below). From this inaccessible crag comes a wild chant. Those who have heard the Moslem priests cry from the mosque can realise the wail or chant of Jotham's parable, like the bard of Welsh story who sang—

‘Ruin seize thee, ruthless king ;  
Confusion on thy banners wait.’

So now Jotham foretells death and defeat. His fable sung, Jotham flies and goes to ‘Beer,’ which is, probably, the Bireh, not far from Bethel, and out of the territory of Shechem. For three years Abimelech rules. Judgment is, however, coming on him for his foul murders : murder of his brothers, too ! Shechem, that central position in Palestine, favoured by climate, by soil, well watered, well timbered, was held by a mixed people. The old Canaanite and the Israelite strove each for the upper hand ; and this Canaanite mixture is perhaps the clue to the reason why the men of Shechem so readily listened in the first place to Abimelech, for he could say, I am a native of Shechem, a Canaanite, too, ‘bone of your bone ;’ and with one accord those people had said, ‘He is our brother.’ Race hatred was at the bottom of the crime. But the ‘king’ has no easy task. A traitor himself, he ‘is dealt with treacherously.’ He sets up a deputy to rule, who betrays his master. Robbers infest the country, and from the tops of the mountains the robber-chiefs note all who pass through the valleys. When full of wine, the revolvers ‘curse’ Abimelech. Then they recall the fact that he is son of Jerubbaal, a half Israelite : they want a native prince. ‘Hamor, the father of Shechem,’ is named ; and here we see how the savage retaliation by Simeon and Levi, when Dinah was wronged by

Shechem, had not been forgotten. The deed was now to be avenged. The native chief, Gaal, declares he only wants men, and then he would depose the king. Abimelech is warned. With the inherited skill of his father, Gideon, he at night surrounds Shechem. His force is divided into four bands; the revolvers are puzzled; they dispute one with another, until the morning light shows the advancing forces. Abimelech is victorious in the fight, and his deputy, Zebul, drives Gaal out of Shechem. And now in the rich plain, Abimelech, who has divided his force into three companies, falls on the revolvers, is successful, and takes the city, slaying all the people, beating down the walls, and sowing salt on the ruins—savage and ruthless is his vengeance. In the ‘tower of Shechem’ some revolvers still defy the king; axe in hand he leads his soldiers. They cut down the timber of Mount Zalmon, they pile the fagots round the hold, and burn or suffocate the insurgents,—men and women, all are destroyed. Success has made the king rash. Thebez, a strong town about nine miles east of Shechem, still holds out: men and women are there. The king, with a blazing torch in his hand, sought to fire the door: he has no war-engine to batter the masonry. Reckless, daring as he is, he comes too near the walls; a desperate woman in a frenzy throws down the upper part of the hand-mill with which she had been grinding corn. With crushed head, yet the king thinks of his position. ‘Slay me,’ says he to his armour-bearer: ‘let it not be said of me, “A woman slew him.”’ A soldier, he wishes to die a soldier’s death. How often have we seen his example repeated! ‘Shoot me—hang me not!’ was the cry of André. ‘Do not bandage my eyes,’ says Ney, ‘I have looked death often in the face!’

The power of the will in a brave man overcomes the dread of death. Abimelech's death is felt by the people as a judgment of God on his crimes.

The king is dead, and we have not the cry, 'Long live the king!' for again the nation goes back to its 'judges;' and we read of two, one unnamed. His record is brief: he lived, he judged, was ruler twenty-three years, he died, and was buried. Happy man, in those turbulent times to have had such an uneventful history! Then we read of another, 'Jair,' from over Jordan. All we read of him is that he ruled twenty-two years; that he had thirty sons, and they had thirty white ass colts, and that they had thirty cities in Bashan. It is implied that during the rule of these judges the children of Israel had kept themselves away from idols; however, they go back again, and again comes the punishment. Now, from the west the Philistines, then from the hill-country the Amorites—that old-time nation—oppress them; those tribes across Jordan especially suffered from the latter, who, gathering head, passed the Jordan; and the tribes on this side Jordan were betwixt two foes—Philistines west, Amorites east.

The Israelites are gathered at Mizpah across Jordan. The assembly asks for a leader, and Jephthah steps into the front rank. Of ignoble birth, he suffered as a youth; he was despised and taunted with what was not his fault; his father's sins were visited on him; lack of home drove him into the ranks of the freebooters; he was chosen leader. That he was a skilful captain, and dreaded even by his friends, is clear; for when in extremity the men of Gilead turn to him as the only man who can save them, he taunts them, and reminds them that they had driven him out from his father's house, and demands why in their

distress they should come to him. This must have been a proud moment for the freebooter. The leaders of the people pledge themselves he shall be the head if he is victorious, and he insists upon a repetition of the pledge. In reading this story of Jephthah, we must remember that the scene is laid in those wild lands across the Jordan where the tribes had kept their nomad habits even more than the western tribes. The Jordan separated those tribes of Gilead and Manasseh, and institutions had not the force they had—small though that was in those days—with the more settled inhabitants.

Jephthah being chosen leader, his first effort is an embassy to Ammon. It is a remarkable message, summing up as it does the whole of the past history of Israel, for the king of Ammon had claimed the land. Full of point, bristling in argument, where did this freebooter, this leader of 'vain fellows,' get his knowledge? Books were unknown. Doubtless over the camp-fires he had heard from boyhood the story of the Exodus, and all the wondrous after-events; in the gatherings, when the flocks were moving from pasture to pasture, he would have heard the story chanted by the elders of the tribes. And he, too, was a believer in Jehovah. See how repeatedly he says, 'the Lord,' 'the Lord our God.' He appeals to a general sense of justice, and he claims that 'the Lord is judge.' In the light of after-events it is important to note this fully. Through the tribal territory marched Jephthah, doubtless gathering forces as he progresses to the frontier; and then, just before the forces joined, he vows his well-known vow: he will offer to *the Lord* a burnt-offering of whosoever cometh forth of the doors of his house to meet him when he returns in peace. The enemy defeated, he returns homewards;

his daughter meets him accompanied by the damsels,—with music and dancing she joyously greets her father, she, his only child. The successful general is lost in the anguish of a father. ‘My daughter, thou hast brought me very low;’ but ‘I cannot go back.’ The grand self-sacrifice of a woman rises to its full height in his daughter’s reply. ‘Do not think of me—I care not; for by *thee*’—see the love of the girl—‘by thee, my father, *the Lord* “hath taken vengeance on thine enemies.”’ She has a last request, that she may go with her companions into the mountains to bewail her virginity. We must consider one or two points in this narrative. Jephthah was a believer in the Lord. How then could he offer a *human* sacrifice to God Almighty? Would the daughters of Israel go really to ‘praise’ or ‘celebrate’ such an awful event as the death by burning of this woman? We cannot think it. The whole circumstances point that she was for life devoted to the services of the sanctuary as a vestal virgin. Unmarried, she never could hope, therefore, to be the mother of the promised one, who was to deliver the whole of mankind, a hope which was the most cherished dream of every Hebrew woman. Wild and hasty as Jephthah was, still we cannot bring ourselves to think that he, with his faith in Jehovah, should yet fall so low as to offer his cherished one to Chemosh. He has contrasted Chemosh, ‘thy god,’ when he spoke to the Ammonites, with the Lord; and yet, to perform the same cruel sacrifices is, we feel bound to submit, unsupported by the text.

Unmindful of their great deliverance, unthankful to the leader, the men of Ephraim now make a grievance on a matter of precedence; when victory had crowned Jephthah’s efforts, not till *then*, ‘Why were *we* not

asked ?' say the cowards. Jephthah gave a good answer, but he lost his temper and taunted his critics, and then, securing the fords of Jordan, probably those well-known fords now called 'Arabah,' and in Bible times 'Bethabara,' at the foot of Jezreel plain, the fugitives were called to pronounce a word. It was to a Hebrew provincial as difficult as the English R or H is to many people to-day, and it betrayed the speakers. On such trifles did men's lives hang ; on such trifles has the religious world ever differed. In the case in point it was death.

After Jephthah, a man of Bethlehem was the judge. He has thirty sons and thirty daughters. The latter he sends 'abroad,' and from 'abroad' he brings thirty damsels for daughters, wives for his sons. And the list of the judges goes on—no men of mark arise, and the nation is drifting downwards. We see this in the brief records of the rulers. If the Israelites, surrounded as they were by enemies, did not advance, their decay was certain ; their rulers think of weddings, of ass-colts, and so the mass of men drift to evil.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SAMSON

JUDGES xiii.-xxi.

The Life and Death of Samson—Anarchy in Israel.

LIKE a theme of music, the chords of which are struck by the hand of a master,—now loud and terrible, now peaceful and soft,—the story changes from men and their cruel doings, from war and bloodshed, to the quiet home of a God-fearing woman. A wife, and yet not a mother; that she sorrowed at this, we know; doubtless many and frequent were her prayers. A messenger from God warns her not to indulge in strong drink; that this warning was given, implies that the women of Zorah were addicted to drink. Now Zorah was famous for its vines. The hills and valleys near were celebrated for the richness of the vineyards; and history tells its sad tale of the scenes of debauchery which took place in those vine regions, in a hot country such as Palestine. Some wines are particularly heady, and soon excite men or women to foolish deeds. The country was then under Philistine rule, a greater reason for thoughtful, pious Israelites to be temperate and watchful. The woman tells her husband that the face of the ‘angel’ was ‘terrible,’ that he refused to tell his name, but delivered a command. A son is promised who is to be a ‘Nazarite,’ that

is, 'consecrated.' The early command, given in Numbers vi. 2, shows that he or she who became a Nazarite was to drink no wine. 'Vinegar of wine' was also forbidden. This was probably the *thin* wine, for wines in the East were often thick, like treacle, a little of which was very intoxicating: when drunk with water it was less heady. *Strong drink* was wine made from dates, that is also very heady, much like 'potheen' of the Irish peasantry. Many other commands had to be obeyed by the 'Nazarite.'

The woman had full belief in the messenger, but wished and prayed for another and further communication, wanting full directions how to train the unborn but promised son. The angel again appears, and this time the man sees him. All commands are repeated. The man presses for the name, that when the promised blessing comes they may know who to thank. All they are told is that the name is 'secret.'

Samson is born. Soon the strong spirit of the boy is conspicuous; but his early life is unrecorded. In Mahaneh-dan some deeds were done by him which foreshadowed his future. The place mentioned was probably the hill-post overlooking the Philistine country; and it is thought that Samson's father was probably the Israelitish officer in charge of this out-post; the position of the place would imply this. Physically strong as Samson was, yet we see that he was not of the pious nature of his mother. No sooner does he arrive at manhood, than he breaks the commands given by God through Moses. The chosen people were not to intermarry with the people of the land. The young man sees no harm in visiting the Philistines. He falls in love with a girl. Eastern-like he at once goes to his mother; she and the father are to arrange that the damsel is to be Samson's wife. This Philistine maid

probably had all the attractiveness of the Egyptian women, with whom and the Philistines there was such early friendship and intercourse. Even now the people of those low lands resemble the Egyptians more than the Fellahîn of the other parts of Palestine. That Samson had been reared in the faith of Jehovah, we may feel sure; but if he had forgotten the prohibition to marry, he is at once reminded of it by his parents. They do not wish to prevent him marrying, but wish his choice to fall on one of their own race. Doubtless the young man's fancy had been caught by the greater attractions of this Philistine maid, the product of an older civilisation than the Israelites. All the heathen women around were better dressed, more skilful in appealing to the eye of a man than the women of Israel. These, however, soon learnt the lesson their heathen sisters set them. Strong, self-willed, a spoiled son, Samson argued not,—his request was a command. And now we are told all this was happening, so that the Will of God should be done. 'He maketh even His enemies to praise Him.'

All this country of the lowlands was evidently under the Philistine sway. The late judge, Jephthah, held rule over the trans-Jordanic country in the east, but this history relates to the west. Judah and Dan were the tribes under foreign rule, and that probably only on those low foot hills which abut on the maritime plain.

Samson thinks nothing of slaying a lion which attacks him; he tells not of the swarm of bees and honey which he found in the dried carcase; and only at the wedding feast does he think of the events, and forms them into a riddle. The story, as related in the text, is just what would happen now in the same country at a wedding. The guests, the feastings, the riddles, all could be paralleled in

the homes of the Fellahîn. The woman enticed Samson to tell her his riddle, for she feared the enmity of her people. And so Samson soon finds that a woman's tears and sharp tongue can so taunt him as to make him betray his secret to her; and *he*, not the guests, had to pay forfeit. His anger unappeased by the slaughter of the thirty men of Askelon, he leaves his bride, and goes back to his father's house, having had a short and troubled honeymoon. Samson's back is no sooner turned, than the bride's father exercises *his* rights, and she is given to Samson's 'friend,' his 'best man' taking the bridegroom's place. There is no mention of objection on the part of the woman; the 'friend' must also have been 'willing.' As a true Eastern, this woman seems not to have objected to be handed from one man to another; and probably, piqued as she was, she would let her husband see, when he so soon forsook her, that *she* was not going to trouble herself.

In the hills Samson is working; his fit of anger has blown off. He thinks of rejoining his wife when the harvest is ripe; he, however, counts without his host or hostess, and then, full of rage, when he hears the truth, he declines to be consoled by a prettier sister, and, tying three hundred jackals by the tail, he puts firebrands to them, and lets the frightened animals go off into the rich corn lands of the Philistines. How Samson trapped the jackals we are not told; and the number strikes one as being very large. Though, when camped on that ground, we have often wished a Samson would catch the jackals—not to burn the crops, but to rid the country of a pest which makes sleep impossible. Packs of them exist; but skilful indeed would he be who caught a jackal.

The revengeful deed was done at the most critical time, for the harvest had just commenced, some of the

corn was but just cut and in 'shocks,' while the rest was 'standing.' The olive trees take fire—as indeed they must—for the corn is sown amongst the olives in Palestine, and not on treeless fields as with us. Even if the poor wife had been in any way to blame, she is most cruelly treated. The cowardly Philistines finding the *man*, the offender, out of their reach, revenge themselves on the *woman* and her father, and they are burnt—probably as offerings to their god. Now, having just cause for anger, Samson bursts upon the Philistines, probably at the very time of their gathering to rejoice over the cruel deed; for at that time the Philistines would be without arms, and think all secure.

Wild deeds, like this of Samson's, may have kept alive the spirit of resistance to foreign rule in the hearts of some few; but the cowards in Judah are too many, and though the outlaw hides himself in the great cave or cleft in the rock Etam ("eagle's nest"), yet when the Philistines come in force, the men of Judah try to tempt Samson from his hiding-place, which is well known to them; but the Philistines are too wary to trust themselves in the hills. They ravage Lehi, which is at the foot of the hill ranges, and, to appease them, Samson's own people seek to deliver him. His answer to the question, Why did you do this? is the common one: I only hit back when I was hit. There is a charming simplicity about this conference. We will not hurt you, we will only bind you, say the men of Judah. They swear this; and, making new ropes, they take the strong man bound down from his hiding-place. Shouting with delight as the captain comes in sight, the Philistines hasten to meet him. Like threads of fine flax, the stout ropes break. Unarmed, the prisoner finds the jawbone of an ass, and one thousand men fall before him. Again

these Philistines were probably unarmed, for why should they go out to receive *one* man with arms in their hands? They sought not to kill, but to torture him. Do not think that the water to quench Samson's thirst came from the jawbone. No; it came from a 'hollow place in Lehi.' Near this place still are found strong springs, called by the Arabs 'Ayûn Kara,' 'the springs of the crier.' The victor sings his song of triumph, and proudly relates how, by means of a bone of the despised ass, the host is slain.

Judge though he may be, yet it is but the *rôle* of the strong man, the successful fighter; for Samson allows his animal passion again to lead him into sin, and, like a stone rolling down hill, which gains force in its descent, so now the next sin is that of uncleanness. He may be strong with men, but to bad women he is weak. His strength is shown in that he takes away the gates of Gaza. Taking no warning from his escape, having no sorrow for his sin, again he loves—with purely sensual love—a woman of the Philistines. Poor fool, he thinks she will be faithful to him; but no woman, who has once deceived one man, will be faithful to the new comer. Her object is gain; his was lust. She is secretly in the pay of the lords of the Philistines. With all her blandishments, the temptress for some time fails to gain his secret. He lies to her oft, and oft too she finds out he lies. But the drop of water will at last wear away the hardest stone; and so the wicked wiles of a bad woman will, if unresisted, wear away the last fragment of truth in any man, if he flee not from her. Samson cannot now plead youth; he cannot plead that he is unacquainted with the tricks and devices of bad women. No, he loves his sinful chain; he loves his sins too much. Wearied out he tells all. Wild with the thought of the money, and

conquest over the man who had so long foiled her, Delilah delays not to tell the secret. The end comes. He has neglected and despised God; while asleep, his locks are shorn off, and he is bound, and blinded, as the chief captives generally were among Easterns: brass fetters hold the once resistless man. In prison, woman's work is given him, he has to grind corn. Another touch of true Eastern revenge, that he, the wild strong man, should ever be reminded that by a woman he fell, and so he has to do despised woman's work. The prisoner is a show, a subject for sport. The Philistines vaunt their god—half-fish, half-man—over the God of Israel. They feast, and when elated with drink at the great festival of Dagon, Samson is led by a boy into their presence. When a young man he was accustomed to range at will unrestrained, but now so poor there is none to do him reverence. To the kindness of a lad the great chief is indebted. He has a last request, that the lad will 'suffer' him to lean on the pillars of the house or temple. 'Suffer' him; a request so gentle, so humble, so different from the old days of haughty demand. Surely in the prison-house God had visited him. In the darkness the light had gone into his soul; out of the fire he had come refined. His old home, his mother's love, her prayers, had often passed before his mental vision; in the long, solitary hours of the hot days and chilly nights he had had time to reflect, to repent. He utters a cry to God, the only cry to Him reported of Samson, though he acknowledged Him. Yet revenge upon the enemy is the one great passion: Give me but revenge, I ask not for life, is his last cry. In the ruins of the temple the sorrowing brethren seek the mangled body of him who had been so long prayed for; and whose life must have

been a bitter sorrow, a great enigma, to those loving hearts, who had indeed trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel. That his father and mother had long passed away seems most probable, for Samson was buried in his father's tomb.

Young man, take to heart the lesson of Samson's life. He lived in wild times, you live in quiet ones, and yet the human heart is the same; trust not in thy strength or in high resolve, ever be on your prayerful watch against the sin of uncleanness. Think not to say, *She will be true to me, though she has been false to others. No*; it is nothing but vanity which tempts you to think thus; do not flatter yourself that though others fall into the whirlpool *you* will escape, though others are found out *you* will not be. You may become great in the world's estimation, and the voices of the masses be lifted high in your praise—sin against God, and *some day* you will be found out, and when disgraced your friends will turn their backs on you, and all your fame will crumble into dust before the voices of men. Do not attempt to shelter yourself under the saying, *I am no worse than others.* Doubtless there were many bad men living in the ranks of Israel; but the recorded fate of Samson should be a warning that judgment does fall upon the wicked.

From Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, sprang the tribe to whom was given the finest, most fruitful, and central part of Palestine, embracing the hill-country, and including in its limits the central spot in which the sacred Ark was placed at Shiloh. A haughty, overbearing race were these men of Ephraim, and yet, with their arrogance and pride, they combined gross ignorance and superstition. We see it in the story of Micah, a man who was contemporary with those elders who had outlived

Joshua, and who had forgotten or despised all the grand lessons of that great warrior's life. Micah's history begins suddenly. He was a thief: he stole from his own mother, and then, alarmed because he overheard curses against the thief, confessed that he had stolen the silver. Poor mother! She blesses her son. Mother's love made her overlook the crime, and the restitution of the treasure seems to her a pious deed; a small portion she allots for a 'graven image,' a thing she had hoarded the money for. So utterly had idolatry eaten into the hearts of these Israelites, that all the past was forgotten—idols they would have.

The words, 'In those days there was no king in Israel,' are probably a gloss of some later transcriber, for up to this there had been no question raised that the Israelites ought to have a king. That cry came later. The old transcriber, probably, was a believer in monarchy, and thought that a king would have cured all ills. Anyhow, the history of Israel later on did not support his assumption—the remark that 'every man did that which was right in his own eyes' shows a period of disorder which later events prove. The Israelites bursting into Canaan had upset an older civilisation, and, owing to the want of faith of those Israelites, the moment their great leaders—Moses and Joshua—are dead, they did not build up any order in the place of that destroyed. Iconoclasts in one sense, they burnt the idols of the conquered people, but set them up again for themselves! This Micah makes a temple for 'gods,' and consecrates one of his sons as priest. Deeper still is the ignorance, for a Levite, a descendant of Moses, a wandering priest, by accident goes to Micah's house, and for a small stipend, with food and clothes thrown in, acts as priest to the idols. And all this

in the midst of a tribe which held the ark of God! and not far away either, for Ephraim's territory was but fifty-five miles from east to west, and seventy miles from north to south; and this priest knew, or ought to have known, that the law allowed but *one* place of sacrifice and one sanctuary—Shiloh. Great confusion must have existed in the minds of Micah and this Levite, for the 'priest of God' acts as 'priest' to the idols; and Micah flatters himself that, as he has a 'Levite,' a private chaplain of his own, therefore he trusts the 'Lord' will 'do him good'! An awful example of superstition on the part of the man, and indifference on the part of the priest as to which 'God' he served!

Dan, whose territory lay west of Ephraim, a region which extended from Joppa on the north to Ekron on the south, was a very small, though fertile portion—it was really only fourteen miles long; part of the Shephelah, or low hill-country, and part of the plain of Sharon was included in this land; but they had very powerful foes to contend with, for the Philistines drove them into the hill-country, and the Amorites would not allow them to come into the valley. So the 'camp' of Dan was in the hills where Samson had lived. 'Mahaneh-dan,' his home, means 'the camp of Dan.' This tribe, finding themselves cramped for room, sent out spies from Zorah (now called Sur'ah)—on the brow of a sharp hill, a spot famous for its vines, and from its position a good site for a camp of observation and defence, but not suitable for a settled home. These spies pass Micah's house; they know the priest; he blesses them when they tell him their object. How they got to Laish we are not told. Their small number would not, however, excite any animosity, and probably they disguised themselves as merchants.

This Laish is afterwards called Dan; its present name is 'Tell el Kady,' 'the hill of the judge;' a strong spring here gushes forth, and forms one of the sources of the Jordan. The hill is covered with ruins, which are hidden amongst thickets of oak and scrub.

The people of Laish were a small colony from Sidon, and far enough away from that place for it to be no protection to them. The spies go back; then six hundred men consent to try their fate. Well armed for war, they secretly start off, carrying off Micah's gods, and the robes for his priest, whom they had persuaded to cast in his lot with themselves. Ambition was the thing which tempted him; he saw 'preferment.' Better, say the raiders, to be a priest to a tribe than a priest to one man and his house. Gratitude the priest had not; Micah had fed and clothed him. He left him, after stealing his gods, for his more powerful but new friends. These friends have but a short answer when reproached with the theft—it amounts to this: 'Hold your tongues; if you do not it will be worse for you:' and Micah takes the hint. So much for his gods and his priests doing him 'good,' as he had so childishly thought. 'Evil comes home to roost,' as the proverb says.

Secretly these raiders surround Laish, the poor people of which thought themselves 'secure.' All are slain, and the place burnt; no reason is given by the Danites, only that they wanted 'room.' Their motto evidently was, 'They can take who have the power, and they must keep who can.' By these new owners idols are set up, and their place of worship became one of the great snares to Israel, afterwards becoming a chief seat, where the 'calves' were placed.

'No king in Israel' is again the lament of the old

scribe, who goes on to relate a deed of foul lewdness, of the abuse of every law, human or divine, and shows to what a depth of degradation the tribe of Ephraim, and especially those inhabitants of Gibeah, had sunk. An old labourer out of the fields is the only one who exhibits any pity, piety, or kindness. Vile, brutal, were these men of Gibeah, dead to every spark of manliness. Worse than the beasts, no language can describe their foul conduct in its true colours: and yet these men had known the pure law of Jehovah! Success over the heathens had puffed them up till they were worse than beasts—it was a brutal time. Well may the shuddering scribe say, as his pen records these deeds, ‘No such deed was done or seen since Israel came out of Egypt.’ There was an universal shudder through the land, and the tribes justly called on the tribe of Benjamin to put the leaders of the wicked deed to death! No! they decline to do this. Benjamin, descended from the beloved son—‘son of my right hand’—but yet whose haughty, unbending character was foretold by Jacob: ‘He shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.’ Rather than submit to the request of their brother tribesmen, these men of Benjamin take the part of those villains of Gibeah, and refuse to give the criminals up to justice. That one man can commit a foul sin is well known; that the men of a village may be brutes is well known too; but that the men of a whole tribe—elders—should be so lost to all sense of right is indeed a marvel, and throws a lurid light on the ‘religion’ of the tribe.

War follows. The fortunes of the united tribes are all related in full. But as we wander over the now desolate hill of Gibeah and the surrounding country, the conviction

is forced upon us that the scribe who wrote this account was not accurate as to numbers. That seven hundred *chosen* men could come from Gibeah, that small hill, seems impossible, and the numbers given of the whole tribe equally impossible. Had the numbers been anything like this, the country allotted to Benjamin could not have held them; and *if* they did exist, what cowards they must have been not to have utterly destroyed the Philistines and their other enemies long before! Easterns seem never to have been able to count, and compared to Westerns have very vague ideas as to numbers. A short time ago a Bedawy related that an English army, 'large without number, covering the whole earth, eating up the land,' was approaching a certain place in Egypt: it really was the march of two regiments! The land named as the places of conflict would have been one vast charnel-house had the numbers given as slain been exact.

An ambush is then planned by the assailants, which succeeds, and the Benjamites are defeated, the remnant, six hundred men, flying to the rock Rimmon,—now called 'Rümmôn'—a conical rock at the end of a ridge. Looking east the eye passes over the Jordan valley. The rock is very remarkable even in that chaos of wild hills which form the hill-country of Benjamin. Steep 'wadies' or ravines twist in and about those hills; the sides of the ravines abounding in natural caves. Near 'Rümmôn' are some more remarkable than others from their size. They are used now by the Fellahîn to fold their flocks. Explorers say that six hundred men could easily find shelter in these caves. And shelter those fugitives would certainly require in the four months they lived here. The Israelites, when in distress, ever took to holes and caves: doubtless the real reason was that in that rocky country

there were no other hiding-places or shelter. No forests could ever have existed there ; only scattered trees strive to obtain a foothold. The question of food must have been a serious one, and yet they could probably get supplies from the Jordan plain ; and as the tribes had exhausted their anger, they would doubtless wink at any kindness shown to the remnant of Benjamin. The 'cities' destroyed could not have been large—mere villages, the country being too hilly for larger towns. 'Villages' to a race who lived much in tents, whose fathers had been wanderers in the desert, even the smallest collection of houses or settled habitations would impress them. Bethel, only a few miles away, was the gathering-place of the victors. Here, full in view of the destroyed houses, the people 'wept sore.' Tears seem unmanly to us Westerns,—as the poet says, women will weep for a bird :

' But woe betide a country when  
It sees the tears of bearded men !'

The marriage question was a difficulty even then ; but these people had a very simple way of settling any difficulties of that sort. Six hundred men wanted wives. A city across the Jordan had not helped the victors, so that city is doomed, and four hundred damsels are sent as a peace-offering to the men of Benjamin at Rimmon. Of the grief which these captives must have felt at the loss of home, of parents, brothers or sisters, no note is taken—it was a barbarous time, and 'feelings' were not encouraged.

The next statement is a considerable puzzle. Shiloh was the resting-place of the sacred ark, yet the people living near were Canaanites, for the Israelites had sworn that no daughters of Israel should be wed to a Benjamite. So when the 'daughters of Shiloh' came out to dance at the village

feast, it was planned that the bachelors of Benjamin should carry them off, the tribes promising to make peace with the outraged parents. Rimmon was a few miles over the hills, not more than eight. The wives obtained, the six hundred men were then allowed to return to their inheritance, and rebuild their 'cities,' which shows how small those 'cities' must have been for such a limited number of men to rebuild them. No traces of any extensive ruins exist in these localities, but fragments on many a hill-top or slope show that what is now barren was at some time the abode of men. Rock-cisterns tell of the care for water, while from the limestone rocks good springs gush out. Whoever wrote the history of Judges must perforce have been a believer in monarchy as a remedy for all disorders, for the book closes with the oft-repeated remark as to there being no king.

## CHAPTER IX

### SAMUEL

RUTH i.-iv. ; 1 SAMUEL i.-viii.

The Story of Ruth—Eli—The Birth and Calling of Samuel—Wars with the Philistines—The Demand for a King.

LOOK at the map of the world, see what a little space Palestine or Sinai occupies, and yet in those tiny regions things have come to pass which have influenced the whole earth, changed the whole circumstances and aims of all ages, and planted a seed whose growth is to fill the whole world. The Bible, too, is unique in the same respect. 'Profane' history tells of the doings of great conquerors, their ideas, ambitions, loves, or hatreds. The Bible relates principally facts relating to the poor or the obscure. So now, after 'Judges,' with its deeds of blood and sin and strife, we get a family history of an obscure woman, from whom sprang the Saviour of the world. The story of Ruth runs like an idyll, and with its simple pathos delights every race or age. We know that the Jews formerly included the story in Judges, but the modern Jews place it after the Song of Solomon. It is commonly supposed that Samuel was the scribe, and that he wrote to show that 'God is no respecter of persons,' and to shadow forth the great truth that Gentiles were to be even then admitted and accepted, as if born of Israel.

The character of Ruth is that of a woman who longed for God: doubtless her dead husband had taught her of Jehovah. She *must* give up all and follow Him. Boaz was an upright man, a follower too of the Lord; for does he not speak of the 'God of Israel' as a rewarder of those who trust in Him? The same lesson had been taught before, like every lesson in that Eastern book, by lives—lives even of heathen women. If the lesson was to teach that God the Father cares for and loves all, this revelation might not perhaps be understood by the mass. Be sure, however, that those holy men of old who were inspired to write, saw if even through a glass darkly, the meaning, the faint shadow, of the coming Gospel-message: 'Peace on earth, good-will to men.' The great lesson of the book is, that no private life, however humble, is beneath the care of the great Creator, that no private person, of whatever race, may not prove to be *the* chosen vessel through which streams of mercy may flow.

In our Bible, Samuel is divided into two books; it is really but one in Hebrew. It was in the Septuagint that it was first divided into two. The earliest authority which ascribes the book to the prophet is the Talmud (A.D. 500). It is evident from the twenty-fifth chapter that Samuel did not write all, for in that chapter the death of Samuel is recorded. Probably Nathan the prophet, or Gad the seer, finished the record. It opens with an account of the family life of a 'certain man,' Elkanah; he lives at Ramathaim-zophim, 'heights of views,' a village on Mount Ephraim. Almost all the towns or villages in Palestine were situated on heights. There were several reasons for this: the country is generally hot, and on the hills the summer heat is tempered by the sea breeze, which every day at mid-day springs up from the Mediterranean Sea; then the low

grounds are subject to malaria and fever—these fevers cling to the low ground, and rarely rise more than 100 feet; and, lastly, villages were built on heights for safety; they were difficult of access, as a rule, owing to the steep formation of the limestone ranges, and from afar the inhabitants could see any foe. These conditions are very different from old towns or hamlets in our own land. With us old places are usually on the banks of streams, for our forefathers were settlers from the sea. Our hamlets are usually low, for in our climate what was needed was shelter and warmth. But since the discovery of coal, houses with us are frequently built on hills. This will help to explain why, so often in the Old Testament, towns or villages are almost always described as being on hills.

Once every year Elkanah goes to worship at Shiloh. Eli, the chief priest, is assisted by his two sons; and, as in heathen worship, feasting seems to have been common at this yearly meeting, and drinking to excess was not uncommon. Little is recorded of the service; the story, as is so common in the Bible, being the history of people, poor, and apparently of little influence. The man has two wives: we see that the reason was that Hannah was childless; this to an Eastern woman is the greatest sorrow and reproach. Even to this day it is the rule that a wife, when a mother, is not called by her own name, but ‘the mother of’ So-and-so. The longing for a son and heir was and is intense with Easterns; female children are despised, and often neglected in the hope of their early death, and still among wandering tribes female children are murdered at birth. This horrid custom we found existing in a tribe of Bedawin with whom we once stayed. In early days Hebrew women had too the additional desire and hope that any mother might be the

parent of the promised Deliverer. That promise given to the mother of all, in the lost Paradise, had sunk deep into the hearts of all. This poor woman had not only her own grief to bear, but the taunts of the other wife who had sons and daughters; so while the one rejoiced, the other was sad, and in bitterness of heart she poured out all her sorrow to the Lord; then too she vowed a vow. Her very vow proves her piety; she referred all things to the Lord; she had the faith, though it were but the grain of mustard seed which He loves and blesses. Eli misjudged her, thought her grief but intoxication, and reproved her sharply. Here he did but his duty, but he judged as man judgeth, unable to see the heart, and when he is told the truth he promptly blesses the woman, and prays that 'the God of Israel' may grant her petition,—as man he could not grant it. We see here that, though this worship at Shiloh might be a mere form of feasting and ritual to many, yet to Eli and Hannah it was a true service. Hannah believed that God had heard her prayer; the comforting words of Eli reassured her, and no longer sad, she goes to her home. Next year Elkanah goes to the yearly sacrifice without his favourite wife, for she now was a happy mother; and not forgetting her vow, she wished to nurture and train the son till 'weaned.' This to an Eastern woman would be a period ranging from five to seven years, a custom still existing. And we see now in that Eastern land that lads of six or seven years are precocious and vastly more advanced in *some* knowledge than with us—*book* knowledge may be wanting, but that of men and things is often very remarkable. It is nothing uncommon for travellers to be received and hospitably treated by the sons of Bedawin sheikhs when the lad is but seven years old, for their manner is grave, and their conduct and

tact great. The same thing is not uncommon in America. Those of us who have delighted in those charming lives of Lincoln, Grant, or Garfield, will remember what wonderful things are there recorded of those men when boys of quite tender years. So there was nothing uncommon in Hannah having her little son 'when weaned' to minister to 'the Lord' under Eli; we can see that the boy had been trained in the knowledge of Jehovah, by the fact that 'he worshipped the Lord then,' he had learnt it all from his mother. What her perception of the truth was we see from her prayer or song. Her home may have been out of the way, but she had drunk deep of the fountain of eternal truth. She knows that God is a God of knowledge, that He is holy, that He is kind, His actions dictated by love, that all power is His, that safety is in Him alone, that He is a living, present God, the eternal enemy of discord, injustice, and evil, the eternal helper and deliverer of those who were enslaved and crushed thereby in soul or body, that He loved man as man, and not merely one favoured race,—that He yearned after the souls of the poorest. What a profession of faith coming from this poor woman! Who had taught her? No wonder that with such a mother the lad grew in grace, and that the Lord was with him. The mother's influence is all-powerful for good with lads; the testimony of every man who has won for himself a name, either for noble deeds or for a life of piety, is almost, without exception, traced to the influence of a good mother. The good seed may lie dormant for many years, and be to all appearance dead, but, like the grain of corn found in the Egyptian mummy, let but that seed be planted in congenial ground, and a ripe, rich crop is the result. So the words of a loving mother, deep down in a boy's heart, may lie dormant for

many a long year; but circumstances breathe over them, and the long-hidden seed springs up.

Now though Eli had two sons, and those priests, yet 'they knew not the Lord.' They were greedy of gain; they did unlawful things; they strove for the good things—strove, too, in an unlawful manner; and, worse still, they lived foul lives with the women who assembled at Shiloh; they lived the life of the priests of the Middle Ages, who went on their pilgrimages accompanied by all the bad characters of the land. So lost were they to all sense of decency, all feelings of self-respect, all fear of God, that they profaned the very outskirts of Shiloh with their lust; they made worship stink in the nostrils of every man, so that 'men abhorred the offering of the Lord.' No man or boy sins to himself alone, he drags down or influences others. So Eli's two sons are passed over, and the little Samuel, though a child, 'ministered to the Lord.' The wicked priests might eat the flesh, and by force take the fat, and live their foul lives with the women; the child, clad in his simple garment of white, was *the* priest of God.

Good as Eli was, he was wrong in that he was weak; he, as judge, should have sternly punished the wrongdoers, even though they were his sons, and he is sharply reminded by the 'man of God,' how that in Egypt his father had been chosen to serve God truly, and that now he had wrongly honoured his own sons before his God—a terrible charge to make. A terrible judgment is pronounced on his house and race, all because he had neglected his duty; he had not done the sin himself, but he, having power, had neglected to use it rightly, and had allowed others to sin—a warning to all in authority.

By a revelation to the child the Lord again forewarns

Eli, and foretells all the consequences of his sin of neglect ; he knew that his sons were vile, and he ‘restrained them not ;’ good in himself, he had not the necessary strength for his position. His answer, when told of the coming woes, may have been dictated by a spirit of resignation : it looks much like the weak words of a good man who was content to let things ‘slide ;’ but the thing was noised abroad from one end of the land to the other. From north to south, men knew that now there was a prophet of the Lord at Shiloh, and so to this secluded glen the thoughts of the nation turned. On every high hill the heathen gods had their altars or temples. Overlooking a deep valley, on a rising ridge, stood Shiloh. It was a central position ; the great north road passes within a mile or two on the west. Its position, so out of the way, and yet so well described in Judges as ‘on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah,’ has been identified and explored ; nothing grand marks the spot. On the ridge stand some scattered ruins, some early Christian, some Moslem, and others. Can they be Jewish ? The Jewish traditions say that the Tabernacle was a low stone wall, covered by a tent covering ; there is still a very old wall, which looks Jewish. There are close by some rock-hewn sepulchres, in which one can fancy that Eli was laid to rest ; and there does seem to be good grounds to think that the very site of the Tabernacle exists, for there is a level rock scarp 77 by 412 feet, the scarp being sunk 5 feet, which may mark the site of the old sanctuary. When we were there, the fountains were overflowing, and flowed through a narrow channel to a large rock-cut pool, and further on, a large reservoir stored the water. Of vineyards there are none now

existing; they were, however, planting vines when we stayed there. So, ere long, Shiloh will probably again resemble the place where the 'daughters of Shiloh' assembled to dance close to 'the vineyards.'

All this time we have heard nothing of the nation, for the story has been of a child, his mother, and unworthy priests. Now the national story is taken up again, and the old enemy—the Western Philistine—is attacked. Who began the fray, we are not told; and the site of the camps is unknown. Many suggestions have been made, as to 'Eben-ezer' and Aphek; but none fit well with the narrative. The result of the first contact of forces was in favour of the Philistines. Then the elders lead the people in superstition. Say they, 'Let us take the ark,' thinking the power was in the *thing*. Nothing, however sacred, has the power of itself; and so, with the two unworthy priests in charge, the ark is taken. Presumptuous, hasty, the Israelites shout for joy. The Philistines are correspondingly depressed. *They* knew well all the past history of Israel in Egypt; and they feared the gods of the Hebrews; but, like brave men—though they thought all was over—they cried out, 'Quit you like men.' Fate might be against them, but they would strive to overcome fate. Their leaders appealed to the pride of race. Should they, Philistines, be servants to the Hebrews? Why, these had been the most obsequious servants to them. Despair and pride nerved the arms of the hearers, and Israel was defeated. Broken up, the fugitives only thought of their individual safety, and so fled 'to their tents.' The ark fell into the hands of the victors. The two false priests were slain; they had trusted in the ark as to a fetich, and it had not delivered them. A swift runner carried the news to the old priest. His rent

clothes and dust-covered head speedily told the tale of disaster to the people. The shrill cries of the women then, as now, rang out; and the blind old priest at the city gate fainted when the runner had gasped out: 'Israel defeated! great slaughter! your two sons dead! and the ark of God taken!' At the last word Eli's beating heart stopped. He fell, broke his neck, and died. The wife of Phinehas, Eli's second son, died also, bringing forth a son; and when the crowd of women tried to console her with the good news of a son, a mother's joy was swallowed up in the cry: 'The glory is departed from Israel.'

The ark of God is taken from Eben-ezer—'the stone of help,'—to Ashdod, now called Esdud, one of the five Philistine strongholds on the coast, where, three miles from the sea, the ruins exist on a sandhill, surrounded by the sand-dunes of the Mediterranean. Originally it was a position of great strength, for it stood on the great military road between Egypt and Syria. It is half-way station from Joppa to Gaza. Why the ark was taken there probably was that it was the seat of Dagon-worship—the great god of Philistia; and the victors but followed the usual heathen custom of parading the gods of conquered nations before their own deity. This god was a fish-god. From representations sculptured on gems, he had the head and hands of a man, while the body was that of a fish. The Babylonians had a tradition that, at the beginning of their history, a being half-fish, half-man, taught them law, religion, and order; and it is thought the Philistines had some similar worship. But, if these Philistines thought to magnify their god, the morrow dispelled the notion—their god was on the ground broken in pieces. The affrighted priests dared not enter the temple; while the people were afflicted with a painful

disease. They at once connected their sufferings with the insult they had offered the ark, and so passed it on to their neighbours at Gath.

Gath is situated on a high chalk cliff. It lies east of the great military road, and was the scene of many of Richard's exploits in the Crusades, when it was called *Blanche Garde*. On three several occasions we are told the Lion King was attacked, when almost alone, going from Gath to Gaza, and each time cut his way through, killing many, and one time capturing five Saracens, and at another seven, with his own hand. The land is now much encumbered by the drifting sands; but enough remains to tell that it was formerly rich and fertile; and these hilly positions kept the entrance to the valleys which lead into the Judean hills. Now, all that remains are huge stones, foundations, reservoirs—many of which are subterranean—telling of past importance.

At Gath the people are afflicted too, and therefore they pass on the ark to their friends at Ekron. But these people did not covet the gift. Terror-stricken, they besought their lords or chiefs to send it away to 'its own place,' for affliction had fallen on them too. Ekron was on the extreme north of the Philistine frontier, situated on a ridge which overlooks, on the one hand, the rich plains of Sharon, and on the other a small bay, now called Jamnia. Hardly anything remains to mark its former importance.

All this journeying of the ark took time—seven months; and it would appear that this was the period of calamity, for after that, the leaders consult 'priests and diviners.' Divination was of many kinds; by the rod, cup, and arrows, a notable instance of which we find in Ezekiel xxi. 21, where it is said the king of Babylon 'stood at the

parting of the way,'—that is, where the great military roads crossed—and 'made his *arrows* bright;' he also 'looked in the liver.' They first made the arrows bright, so as to follow them with the eye; then, shooting them, they followed in the direction the greater number fell. Another plan was to mark the names of places on arrows, they mixed them together, and then to go for the place which was first drawn; and another by examining the entrails of a newly sacrificed animal, or 'looking in the liver.' We have no hint which was followed here.

Images of golden emerods and golden mice were made as trespass-offerings. Here we probably get a hint of Egyptian ideas: mice, in Egyptian priestology, signified *disaster*. In a jumble of superstitions we find the people are told to 'give glory to the God of Israel.'

The Philistines were well posted in all the past Egyptian history of Israel; and latest discoveries shew us that they were offshoots from the Egyptians and allies to them; hence their hatred to the Hebrews. The Tell el Amarna Tablets, recently discovered, throw great light on the Egyptian rule over the Syrian seaboard. In one tablet we are told of an advance of the Hittites from the north, while the *Hebrews* are spoken of as coming from the eastern hills. The general asks for help. He tells of the loss of Gaza, of Gath; he appeals for help. A remarkable note by the scribe is added: "No. As regards this matter also, No. Twice has the king sent back this message." The local governor had to struggle on. The then Pharaoh of Egypt, Khu-en-aten, sent them no aid; and so Syria was lost to the Egyptians. This advance of the Hebrews is, without doubt, that under Joshua, spoken of in the Book of Joshua, and during the times of the Judges. These Philistines, then, were offshoots

of the great Egyptian conquest, which at one time covered the whole of Syria. The sacred ark would be no new thing to them; for in Egyptian pictures we see a sacred ark frequently represented.

So these Philistine leaders urged their people not to fall into the error of the Egyptians. A new cart, drawn by kine on whom no yoke had been laid, is to carry the ark away. At Beth-shemesh, the border, where the rich corn lands divided the frontier, the kine stayed. The Philistine lords go back, doubtless glad to see the last of what had been such a source of trouble and loss to them, while the people of Beth-shemesh rejoiced. Their zeal had, however, no discretion. They profaned the ark, and suffered death. The ark had hitherto been treated with the greatest reverence, and no idle inspection of it permitted. Beth-shemesh, 'house of the sun,' is now called 'Ain Shems, 'spring of the sun,' situated on the lowlands in the valley of Sorek. The ruins show it to have been a small place; and some error must have crept in as to the numbers slain. The Syrian version says five thousand and seventy, so also the Arabic; Josephus says seventy; a possible explanation might be that the numbers slain were fifty, three-score, and ten men of the thousand, *i.e.* one hundred and twenty men.

At the request of the people of Beth-shemesh the ark is now taken to Kirjath-jearim, 'city of forests,' by many thought to be Kuriet el 'Enab, 'city of grapes,' a thriving village on the right of the road which leads from the lowland to the hill-country. Major Conder has suggested 'Erma,' four miles from Beth-shemesh, in the valley of Sorek, a ruin standing in a country still covered with thick copses. Dr. Chaplin suggests Soba; so authorities differ. Here for twenty years, until David was king, the ark

remained. Evidently the Philistines harried the Israelites; for Samuel, desiring to effect a reformation in the people, used as an argument that if they repented and reformed, then they would be delivered out of the hands of the Philistines. The latter nation were better armed and better organised than the Israelites, and seem to have been governed by a more settled and patriotic spirit; anyhow, they showed a more manly love of country. At Mizpah the Israelites gather, perform religious rites, fast, repent; but no sooner do they hear that the old enemy has heard of their gathering, and proudly is marching against them, than they lose heart, and beseech Samuel to cry without ceasing unto the Lord that He will save them: they, who ought to have remembered all their past history, and how they had been led when few against many. If only they had had braver hearts! True, the Lord did hear the prayer of Samuel; and some terrible thunderstorm so discomfited the Philistines that they fled. And then out come Israel from their high place, Mizpah, and follow the fugitives to Beth-car. No thanks to them; the Lord had wrought the victory Himself. Mizpah is generally accepted as the Neby Samwil, where stands a mosque, formally a church. The place is four and a half miles N.N.W. of Jerusalem. It is a strong position, a landmark to the whole country. Beth-car is unknown; but was some place on the low ground. So deeply were the Philistines impressed by this event that, while Samuel lived, they never again attempted to attack Israel. Remember, they knew all the history of the Exodus. Their leaders had well understood how fatal had been the policy of the Pharaohs; and they had often used the argument that their people were not to harden their hearts, 'as did the Egyptians,' and so bring greater destruction on themselves. The territory

regained by Israel was from Ekron to Gath, which was ten miles south-east of Ekron. This gain was probably the result of other conflicts of which we have no details. The Israelites were enabled to devote their whole attention to this frontier, as they were at peace with the Amorites (dwellers on the summits or highlands). This warlike race occupied territory on both sides of Jordan ; for we find them at En-gedi in Gilead, and Bashan, and in Mount Hermon. Though Joshua had overthrown them, yet they were undismayed, and were at all times a dangerous foe.

Samuel was untiring in his efforts to raise the national spirit, to promote the cause of right. Year after year he journeyed on a circuit. The places given show what a little bit remained to Israel : Bethel, north ; Gilgal, east, in the Jordan valley ; and Mizpah, were the limits. His home, Ramah, a hill not far from Bethel on the north road. Little the territory ; and none of it very fertile, except Gilgal. Israel had indeed sunk very low since the conquering days of Joshua. True, Samuel had as deputy-judges his sons ; but they were far south in Beer-sheba. He, like Eli, had unworthy descendants. The virtues of the great prophet had not descended to his sons. A fact like this, so often recorded in Holy Writ, is surely intended for some lesson. Goodness and priesthood were not an inheritance. The fickle people grasp at the least reason for change ; and so ask for a king. They knew Samuel was old. They had nothing therefore to expect from him, and their gratitude was for favours to *come*. It is the fashion now to say that a *people* can do nought wrong ; that the opinion of the masses is always right. How is it in this case ? The idea has often been propounded, and as often the facts of history have disproved the statement. Samuel had no ' cry ' to go to the country

on; and so the masses asked for change. He warns them; draws a dark picture of monarchy. The people still cry out for their new fad. The poor old prophet does but experience the fate of all who seek to oppose a summer madness. One thing they left out of their calculations; they had despised the leadership of God. Well warned they were of what they would lose. How short were their memories of the days when they had cried unto Samuel, 'Entreat the Lord for us!' Now they wanted to have a king, that they might be like other nations; for that is the reason given. When they knew that they had been a chosen nation, and that their whole position came from being so wonderfully led and chosen by God, a greater example of the blindness of a nation, of the leaders (for the elders speak to Samuel), it would be impossible to find. Nations, like men, are influenced by passion, by unworthy motives, by national greed; and nations, like men, may lose all self-respect, all patriotism, and be self-seekers, and so self-destroyers.

Like a brave man Samuel keeps his own counsel; all he says to these applicants is; 'Go ye every man to his own city.' And then, like a brave man too, he sets himself to carry out with loyalty the plans for a ruler who is to supplant himself; his conduct is full of dignity. The people put him aside: well, he will accept the humbler position, and still try to do the best he can for them and for his successor; no self-seeker he.

## CHAPTER X

### SAUL

#### 1 SAMUEL ix.-xxi.

Saul on the Throne—His Campaigns—His Invasion of Amalek—The Punishment of his Disobedience—David chosen—Goliath—David and Jonathan—Saul's Attempts on David's Life—David a Fugitive.

**K**ISH, a well-to-do man of the tribe of Benjamin, has a son, named Saul, who is sent to seek some strayed asses; he has a long search without result, and then, fearing that his long absence will cause anxiety to his father, proposes to return. The servant, however, suggests they should ask advice of a 'man of God,' near whose home they find themselves; this 'man of God' was Samuel. It seems Saul did not know him; but knew the Eastern custom that it would not be right to present himself before a man in authority unless he took a present. Their bread was eaten, what could they do? The servant had 7s. 2d. in silver, and he suggests that they give this to 'the man of God,' if he will tell them their way. The usual gathering of maidens at the well is noted—still one of those customs of the East coming down to our own day: this is ever the gossiping place, as the village pump is with us. Samuel had been forewarned of the visit; he sets the mind of Saul at rest about the asses, and then bluntly tells Saul that he is chosen for king.

Saul, though he came of Benjamin, a proud, self-willed tribe, he himself physically strong, tall, good-looking, was yet modest, and declaims against such an idea; but at the feast the shoulder, the most honourable joint, is given to Saul. And, as it was summer-time, the prophet and his visitor communed on the roof of the house; and there, doubtless, Samuel opened up all the great future before the young man. He secretly anointed him, giving him directions when to go, and whom he would meet; all happened as foretold. We know that the Philistines had been defeated in the field, yet they held forts on the high grounds. This explains the reference to a 'garrison of the Philistines' at this point. Saul becomes a prophet, and though he tells his uncle part, yet prudently spoke not of the great matter Samuel had confided to him; in this he was right—it was for Samuel to tell the people, it was his secret. Again at Mizpah the people are assembled, when Samuel warns them what the meaning of their demand for a king implies. The choosing by lot was common to all nations at this time. Saul, it would seem, was modest, and shrank from the proposed honour, having hid himself in the baggage; when found, the people notice his immense stature. It is not at all uncommon now in Palestine to find Fellahîn 6 feet 4 to 6 feet 6 inches in height. Now for the first time in Hebrew history rang out the cry, 'God save the king,'—it was an old Egyptian cry. Samuel left none in doubt as to the laws governing the new kingdom, for he not only told the assembly, but wrote the conditions 'in a book.' The new king was followed by a select band to Gibeah, now called Jeba, a conspicuous knoll on the south side of the great chasm of the Michmash valley; it is often mentioned as Gibeah of Benjamin. It would be a strong, and yet a central position, considering that at this

time the Israelites were exposed to the attacks of the Philistines from the west, and the Ammonites from the east, and a country of steep ravines and wild rugged hills. At this time Saul was prudent and conciliatory, for, though some derided him and gave no presents, he held his peace. One of the reasons why the Israelites wished for a king was that war had broken out on their eastern border. Nahash, 'the serpent,' an Ammonite chief, had surrounded Jabesh-gilead, a town on the east side of Jordan, related to Benjamin, for the men of that tribe had carried off four hundred of the maidens of that city, when it had been destroyed in the days of the Judges. Nahash's force seems to have left little hope in the hearts of the people of Jabesh, for they offer to serve him; he, so confident of success, tauntingly gives them seven days' respite, that they may summon help if they can; if not, every man is to suffer the loss of the right eye, which would render them helpless in war. This barbarian despised his foe, and in so doing made a fatal mistake, for Saul was roused—he was no coward—and summoned the nation by an old custom, that of sending among the people portions of the bodies of oxen, with a threat to deal so with their cattle if they did not come to war. Strange, too, to this very day you cannot bring a stronger pressure to bear on an Eastern than to threaten to destroy his animals; a threat to slay himself would have no power, for then the law of blood-revenge would render it incumbent on all his relations to avenge him; but to kill his oxen would only mean a matter of wrangling arrangement. To Bezek, now called Ibzîk, north-east of Shechem, which would be about seventeen miles from Jabesh, now known as Wâdy Yabes, on the east of Jordan, where exists a ruin called ed Deir, Judah sent only thirty thousand men

showing they were not pleased that a man of Benjamin had been selected; this jealousy afterwards bore fruit, as we shall see. Saul sends a message, full of hope and confidence: he says, 'Hold on, we are coming;' his plans show he was not deficient in strategy. He divides his forces, and in the morning watch, just when men out of doors are most sleepy, the Ammonites find themselves attacked on both flanks and in front—'turning movements' were ever favourite plans with the Hebrew generals; the result a complete surprise, a crushing defeat, a total rout. Now the people, elated with their success, proud of their general and king, wish to put to death those who had sneered; but Saul, too noble for petty revenge, ascribes all success to God, and refuses to sully his victory with private revenge. The scene ends with a great festival at Gilgal, where the kingdom is renewed to Saul, showing that there had been a strong undercurrent of opposition, now hushed in victory.

Samuel is determined that there shall be no mistake as to the reasons why he is supplanted in his office as judge and ruler; he boldly stands forth. He, anyhow, had not been an unjust judge, as had his sons, in a land where it is still the reproach that justice can be bought. He protests that his hands are clean, he has no accusers; he, so to speak, demands and obtains a certificate from the people as to his uprightness. Then he recapitulates the past history of the race, points out how that they had cast off the Lord God as their king; no light thing had they done in their eagerness to get a king to lead them against Nahash. Had their forefathers been afraid of hostile kings? Degenerate race. The thunder and rain, coming in the dry season, when, in that Eastern land, rain is unknown, confirm his words; *then* the people feared greatly, the evidence of

the senses being the only sort of evidence that appealed to them ; with a touching promise that he would pray for them he finally warns them, and points out the only path of safety.

And then comes a gap, the historian finding nothing to note till twelve months have passed. In the wild hilly country, near Bethel, Saul gathers a few troops. His son, Jonathan, captures one of the Philistine strongholds. We saw before that, though defeated in the field, yet those enemies held forts, and that of Geba is naturally a very strong position ; the hill is round-topped, and right opposite Michmash, but separated by a wild ravine ; the whole country is full of gorges, the terraced limestone ridges of which are most difficult to surmount. The Philistine 'fort' may have been just where now at the top of the hill we find large squared stones—in a few words the sacred writer hits off the lie of the ground, with an accuracy which, to those who visit the spot, is simply marvellous. A bold stroke, like Jonathan's, rang through the land ; the proud warriors of Philistia were not the people to put up with such a buffet. Saul gathers his forces at Gilgal, in the safe retreat of the Jordan valley. While from the plains of Philistia and Egypt, too, the Philistines muster their host ; chariots have they, showing their Egyptian allies ; horsemen, and the usual Eastern figure of speech, 'as sand by the sea-shore,' shows the number of footmen was great.

The people of Israel hide themselves in caves, in thickets, rocks, even pits. Why ? In this wild country, did they think at all, they must have known that chariots and horsemen were useless ; no, their cowardice had some foundation. By instinct they saw that the capture of this hill fort had brought on an invasion, which, by the

Philistines, was intended to bring the whole matter to a conclusion, and to drive them out of the country. Chariots and horsemen might be useless at Geba or Michmash, but those high lands commanded the great pass, which led straight to Gilgal, the first camp the Hebrews held under Joshua. Could the Philistines but capture the mouth of that pass, their chariots and horsemen would defile on to the plains, and then who could oppose them! This instinct was joined with the cowardice which always seems to have affected the Israelites when in any difficulty; they were elated enough, proud, haughty enough, when victorious—they bore even victory badly. In their heart of hearts, too, they had a knowledge that they had done ill in electing a king; the most fearful crossed the Jordan to put that strong stream between themselves and the foe, while others followed to Gilgal ‘trembling.’ Really they gave up their strong position, in the difficult hill-country, where a few brave men might defy a host; however, there was still one strong man, Jonathan, who had not forsaken his post. Saul, at Gilgal, impatiently waited the appointed seven days for Samuel; in the days of difficulty the thoughts of all men turned to the old leader. Saul, though he was king, yet had no right to offer the sacrifice, for it was presumptuous to take into his own hands all the rights of a *sole ruler*; he seemed to have thought that he ruled by his own right, and owed nothing to Jehovah. He owns to Samuel that he feared the Philistines would follow him to Gilgal. He was headstrong, weak; physically he might be head and shoulders taller than any in the land, but he had a weak head, and no real faith. At his first test he fails, and Samuel tells him so distinctly. What a falling off there had been since the first proud days when Saul commanded a host! now only six hundred men remain.

One can but pity a leader so soon deserted. Gilgal, where such feasting had been, where Saul was victorious over Nahash, was now empty, desolate. Saul goes back to Jonathan, and the six hundred brave hearts too; they occupy the strong point of observation, Gibeah, that guards the pass. The Philistines are across the ravine, and send out flying columns; they dread the hills; they know what a network of passes lead in and about, so three corps of observation go forth to feel for the enemy and to spy out the land. The routes of the column show that they tried to clear the flanks of the Israelites, as well as to feel their front, for, taking the Philistine position as Michmash, Ophrah would be on their left flank, Beth-horon on their right, while Zeboim would be in front; it was an unknown land to them, and so, wisely, and showing that their invasion was conducted by a skilful general, they wished to get 'touch' of their foe, for behind the screen of hills they would be ignorant of what had really occurred at Gilgal. What a rude rabble Saul and Jonathan had to oppose to the chariots and horsemen of their foe! We see also from the text that a great deal must have happened of which there is no record.

We read that Jonathan and Saul were the only two who had swords! What had taken place since the days of Nahash? To relate this it will be useful to glance at their opponents, the Philistines.

This race came from Mizraim, *i.e.* Egypt; they had invaded that land, had been driven out; they were formidable at the time of the Hebrew Exodus, and held the coast from el 'Arîsh to Ekron. The five cities held by them were originally Canaanite, the leading one Gaza, the others Ashdod, Askelon, Gath, and Ekron, which was the most northern. The shepherd-kings of

Egypt were called Phitilion by Herodotus—the name seems akin to Philistine; their country was a most fertile belt, a rolling plain suitable for war chariots, about thirty-two miles long, and from nine to sixteen broad, and was the great highway from Egypt to the Euphrates. Ashdod and Gaza were the keys to Egypt; the people were noted for excellent armour, war-chariots, swords, spears, and shields. Joshua defeated them in his great raid, but they won the land back. In the sculptures at Medinet Haboo, in Egypt, the Philistines are represented as having ships; so we can see that in the arts of war and general civilisation they were greatly in advance of the Hebrews, who at this time chiefly resided in tents, while the Philistines had settled and fortified towns.

The next incident is finely described; it is a word-photo-graph. The very position where the Philistine garrison was placed can be identified. One rock called Bozez, 'shining,' is still the one which principally catches the sunlight on its steep limestone side; the other Senah, 'thorn,' the side in shadow the greater part of the day. The modern name of the great valley is 'Suweinit' (valley of the little thorn-tree); still can be seen the long sharp tongue of land, with its steep cliffs, and still called by the Arabs 'the fort;' the sides of the cliff are full of holes and caves. Jonathan and his armour-bearer must have had steady heads to climb the cliff, but it has been done of late years by a celebrated officer and explorer. Jonathan in his watch-post had often looked across the ravine to the outpost of the enemy, so near that men could shout to each other, and yet the Philistines must have thought their position so secure that they kept little guard. Jonathan had the old warrior spirit of Joshua in him, and dared to do; so up these two men climb,—they seemed so helpless that

the Philistine soldiers invited them to come up ; probably these soldiers had crowded to the edge of the cliff, leaving their arms at the camp. Then full upon them bursts the



THE HILL-COUNTRY OF MICHMASH.

brave warrior, well seconded by his trusty armour-bearer. At this moment an earthquake shook all the country (everywhere in this belt of country you can see the traces of earthquakes ; they are frequent even now).

From the high land of Gibeah Saul sees the commotion. The Philistine army, a mixed host, in their terror and confusion turned their arms against each other, while those recreant Hebrews, who had joined themselves with the foe, now helped to make the confusion worse by fighting against them. There would be no lack of arms, for the six hundred, the cowards who had hid, hearing

the tumult, came out of their dens, and so from every rock and pass came fresh foes. Away past Bethaven, 'the house of naught,' over all that tract of rugged ground, the rout continued,—a tract of country not great in extent, but most fatiguing to walk over, as the writer found to his cost, when studying this battle-field on the spot. Yet on to Aijalon, Beth-horon, went the rout; for here was the pass by which the Philistine fugitives hoped to regain their own strongholds. Well-armed men would here be at a disadvantage with the lightly clad and scantily armed Israelites. A more difficult bit of country for invaders to escape from it would be difficult to find; and the more regular troops would fall easy victims to their pursuers. Saul, hasty as usual, had forbidden his men to eat. Had he not done this, then this defeat would probably have been a Waterloo to the Philistines. The people, fainting from lack of food, despised the Mosaic law, and ate animal food with the blood; it is remarkable how particular Moslems are to obey this law. In various expeditions the writer has found that his men, though suffering hunger, would not eat anything he shot unless they had cut the throats of the birds, and so drained away the blood.

Saul was general enough to know that he ought to follow up his victory. When, however, he consulted the oracle, he obtained no answer, so his anger turned on Jonathan; and but for the people he would have slain his son. Owing to the rash vow of the king the enemy was enabled to draw off his broken forces. Saul reascended the hill-country, and soon found plenty of occupation. From Moab, Ammon, Edom, and eastward, enemies attacked him; from Jobah, near Damascus, and the distant Euphrates kings or sheikhs made war on the

new kingdom, while the Philistines raided as before. The balance of victory inclined to the Hebrews.

Then he warred with the Amalekites, that old foe of the Sinai desert in the far south. Amalek, descended from Esau, had fought Israel at the great oasis when they were weary with the desert march. Though blood-relations to Israel, yet they were the first who opposed by force of arms the peaceful Exodus. Baalam had been inspired to predict the total destruction of the race; and now Saul had distinct orders to destroy them. He is to spare none, and none of their possessions. We cannot go behind the order; it seems very awful. It was to be the test of Saul's obedience.

Telaim, where the Israelites gathered, is supposed to be a spot where the roads to the Amalekite territory converged. It has been suggested that the site may be found at el Kuseir, where the *Dhullaim* Arabs have their headquarters. It must have been in the extreme south of Judah. Yet here again we see the jealousy of that tribe, for they sent but ten thousand men. Saul was not ignorant of the past history of Israel; for he remembers that the Kenites were friendly, and that in the desert march Hobab had been their guide. Therefore he warns that tribe, who detach themselves from Amalek; and now, from Havilah to Shur, the Amalekites are smitten.

A warfare of this kind suited the character of the Israelitish levies. They were not a drilled force, and their attacks resembled those of the Highlanders of Scotland—a wild cheer, and then a wilder charge. What that is capable of, even against well-armed troops, we have seen in the Soudan to our cost; for did we not see troops in square broken, and by rudely armed Arabs? and it

required all the steadiness of English soldiers and the self-devotion of the bravest officers to repel the rush.

‘Havilah’ probably was the old home of the Amalekites—from the great oasis, Rephidim, now known as Wâdy Feiran, and including all the rich gold-mining district of Maghara, to the desert of Shur, *i.e.* ‘the desert of the wall,’ the border of Egypt. This was a widely sweeping campaign, *and the first time the Israelites had revisited that region since the Exodus.* Saul carried out a portion of the commands he received; but spared Agag the king, and the best of the flocks and herds, only destroying the worthless. Did he wish that Agag should grace his triumphal return? Anyhow he had in a headstrong manner done as he liked himself, and thought little of his orders. The army, encumbered with plunder, had made their long march back through the desert, seemingly by Beer-sheba; for they halt at Carmel—not the mountain on the western seaboard, but Carmel, now known as Kurmul, in the south of Judah, a few miles south of Hebron. Here he seems to have set up a monument (the monument set up by Saul is called a ‘hand,’—it would seem as if the king was infected by Phœnician notions, for their monuments of victory had hands carved on them) in honour of his victorious campaign; and then, turning east through the passes of En-gedi, he reaches the plains of Gilgal.

Samuel had tried to meet the king, but had apparently missed him at Carmel. With stern reproaches the old prophet greets the victor. The bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen did but raise the old man’s anger. Saul’s excuses are pushed aside, and stern judgment passed on the king. He is briefly reminded that when unknown he was chosen; that he had received orders which he had

not obeyed. Saul pleads that he intends to offer the beasts as sacrifice, and in the next breath says 'he feared the people;' and then we get that grand precept, 'To obey is better than sacrifice.' Saul tries in vain to get the prophet to recall his sentence. Trying again and again, he fails; and now the door of repentance is closed. Still he clings to the barren honour of kingship. He begs Samuel not *openly* to break with him. Better far had he cast off his kingly robes, and gone back to his home a private man, than to live on, a king unblessed by God.

For Agag one cannot but feel pity. He had reason to think that after such a long captivity, and such a long march, his life was to be spared. Samuel not only pronounces his doom, but becomes himself the executioner. A savage picture; but the times were savage. Agag had been a ruthless conqueror; and it was 'eye for eye and tooth for tooth' in those days. Saul's failure was that he was always trying to assert his right to be sole judge of his own conduct. He did not recognise that in this instance it had been intended he should be but the instrument of God's wrath against a cruel race. Gloom gathers over Saul; never more is he to see the old prophet who advised and warned him. While in his home at Ramah the old man mourns over the king. He foresees what misery is coming on him and his race. He mourns as one without hope; he knows not that his gloom is to be soon dispelled, and that ere long he is to see the rise of the brightest and best of all the Old Testament characters; ay, and almost the brightest and best of all men.

As Samuel was directed to the smallest tribe to select the first king, so now he is sent to the largest and most powerful to choose his successor. High priest though he might be, and filled with the Spirit of the Lord, yet

Samuel dreads the power of Saul, and knows full well that he so loves his kingship that did he but dream he was to be supplanted, nothing would prevent Saul wreaking his vengeance. The relations of king and prophet were already strained, and the old man did not wish to give the king any seemingly just cause for resentment.

What a lively light on this primitive time does the picture present of the old prophet leaving his mountain home at Ramah, driving before him the red heifer for sacrifice. It would be a long tramp past Bethel, and then Beeroth, and over Scopus; then, descending the hill slope, he would pass on the left hand Jebus—that old fortress of the Jebusites, afterwards to be the site of Jerusalem—and thence away over the plain of Rephaim; they would wind up the slopes of the hills, past Rachel's tomb, and somewhere on those breezy uplands of Bethlehem—probably to the westward of that huge pile of convents which crest the steep eastern slope of the Bethlehem hills—they would find the home of Jesse in the patrimony of Boaz. From the heights the elders had seen the prophet, and 'trembled' at his coming. His person was not unknown to them. He visited them in his yearly circuit as judge. What could be the meaning of this visit, so out of its usual course? Anxiously they ask, in usual Eastern phrase, 'Comest thou peaceably?' His sons had doubtless taught them to fear the advent of the judge. With them it meant, as it would now, impositions, fines, punishments. Their fears are set at rest by the reply, 'Peaceably.'

The religious rites over, he asks for all the sons of the household, and, forgetful of his past experience, when he sees Eliab, so tall, so well-favoured, he deems that *he* is the one sought. Samuel, prophet as he is, needed to

be retold that the Judge of all is not misled by outward appearance, that He Who knoweth the hearts of all men judges not as men judge. The best, the wisest of men may err, but God alone can know what is in the heart of man. Every son of Jesse passes by but the youngest, the one who tends the sheep. It shows David's tender age; for only women and youths performed that office. It was a mean one; but had not Moses, the great lawgiver, kept the sheep in Midian, and was not Jacob too a shepherd? David is described as 'ruddy.' Strange that the Egyptian records, whenever they do speak of the Hebrews, speak of them as red-haired! and we only know Jews by their sallow complexion and dark hair. The lad was but fourteen or fifteen years at most when this startling event happened to him. He was 'goodly to look on.' His open-air life has given him his fresh complexion and his slight and yet wiry frame; and his guileless countenance impressed the old priest, who must have recalled, as he saw the youth, his own young days when he, a lad, 'ministered to the Lord' in Shiloh.

That neither Jesse nor his sons realised the full meaning of Samuel's proceedings is clear from after-events. Probably they thought that at most it indicated that David was chosen to assist Samuel in the prophetic office. To David, however, it was the voice of the Lord; it broadened and deepened his faith. 'The Spirit of the Lord' was just 'that inspired and Divine element which has converted and still converts millions of souls.' It was this which made David cry, 'My soul is athirst for God, even for the living God.' He, like all men, wanted 'a living God, who cares for men, works for men, teaches men, punishes men, forgives men, saves men from their sins.' This is the God the Bible reveals to men. He has revealed Himself

by living acts ; and as the Bible reveals to us God working, blessing, loving in the past, be sure He is so now in the present. If we do not believe this, as sure as that the Israelites came to ruin, so shall we of England too. Man *cannot* believe in a not-living God. One who would let the world and mankind go their own way is a God no man or nation would care to believe in. No ; the God revealed to us is One Who does help the oppressed, Who does interfere to right the wrong, Who wills that man should be free, and Who sent freedom down from heaven.

As the light is breaking in the soul of David, so the darkness deepens in the mind of Saul. Brooding over the past, fearful of the future, exasperated at Samuel's absence, he broods himself into madness. He knows he has offended God, and pride forbids that he should humble himself and seek the pardon which would have been given him. His was not the nature to say, 'Thy will be done.' His mania increases. To charm away his delusions David is recommended for his skill in music ; and though men were ignorant of the great future before the lad, yet all could see that 'the Lord was with him.' We know that there is a difficulty here. This chapter speaks of David's first introduction to Saul as occurring when he came as musician : the next chapter, as we shall see, puts it as occurring after the victory over Goliath. It must suffice to say that the book of Samuel is not arranged in chronological order, and we suggest that chapter xvii., especially verse 15, shows that David, after Saul's recovery from his mania, returned home to Bethlehem, and that when he is seen by Saul, after the victory over Goliath, the king had no remembrance of what had occurred in his illness. Abner seems to protest too much that 'he knows not the lad.' Courtier-like, he does not care to know any one

the king professes ignorance of; or it may, perchance, have been a better motive. He, Abner, did not wish to enter into explanations as to what had happened when the king was suffering from his madness. It would have required a long explanation, and one very painful to Saul; so he let it pass. There are many points in Old Testament history which are difficult to explain; but those points are of no importance compared to the fundamental points we *can* understand. Dean Milman well puts it, 'that it is an unwarrantable as well as unsafe rule to lay down concerning the Jewish history that which was never laid down concerning any other, that either every particular of it must be true, or the whole false.'

What was the harp like on which David played? The *kinnôr* was the national instrument of the Hebrews, said to have been invented before the Flood (Gen. iv. 21). Opinions differ as to its shape. All that Scripture tells us is that it was composed of the sounding parts of good wood, and furnished with strings. Josephus says it had ten strings, and that it was played with a plectrum (quill); that played on by David was, however, with the hand. The Greeks used the harp for expressing sorrow; the Hebrews for joy and praise.

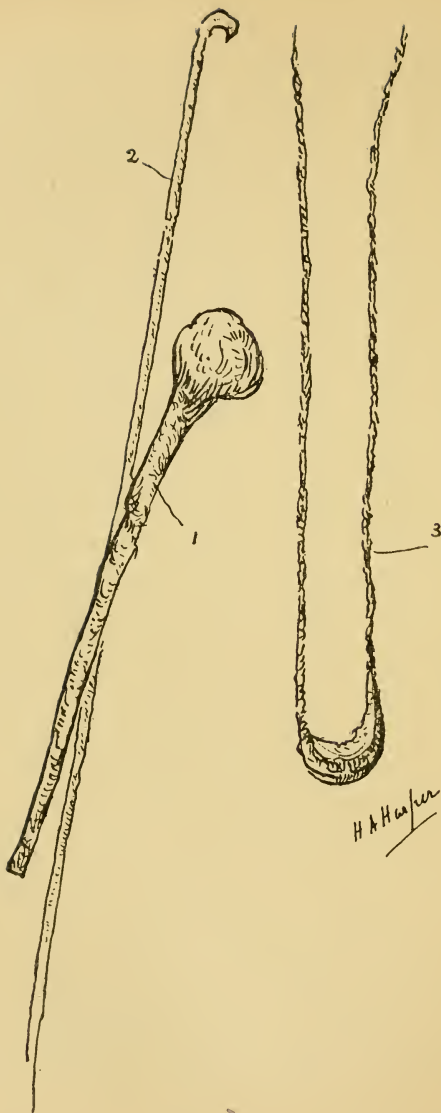
Some twenty-six years had elapsed since the defeat at Michmash; and the Philistines took heart again to once more bring about the overthrow of the monarchy of Saul. This time they come up from the low ground by the pass of Elah. Among the towns on its banks was Keilah, on a steep terraced hill, then the wâdy widens, and here is the city of Adullam; from thence the valley turns westwards, and close by, on the left bank, was Socoh or Shochoh; further on, the valley

opens into the Philistine plain, and commanding the mouth stands Gath, on its white cliff. This Valley of Elah was the great highway from the plains up to the low hills, which were held by the Israelites. At the place where this valley bends, the road from Jerusalem crosses it; this is, probably, the road down which Saul marched his army. Ephes-dammim means 'field of blood;' its name now, 'Beit Fased,' 'house of bloodshed,' carries on the old traditions. Elah, 'valley of the terebinth,' still has acacias growing on its sides, and below is the torrent bed of the small brook, full of white rounded pebbles water-worn by the winter torrents; in this valley still stands one of the largest terebinth trees of the district. Such were the positions chosen by the rival armies,—the Israelitish one being on the eastern side of the ravine, which is narrow, with steep banks, it being evident that what the Philistine forces wished to gain was possession of that Jerusalem road. Why they delayed so long is not so clear, unless they had misgivings—that may have been the reason why their champion, Goliath, came out to challenge a single foe. This man, whose height is given as 'six cubits and a span,' would be approaching ten feet in height; true, the Septuagint and Josephus say '*four* cubits and a span'—this would considerably reduce the height, still, however, leaving him a very tall man. Probably he was descended from those Anakim who dwelt in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. As described in Judges i. and Joshua xiv. it is clear from Scripture that a race of giants existed in the early days of Joshua's conquests. Goliath's armour is minutely described. It has been objected that 'brass' was unknown to the Hebrews, and that we ought to read 'copper,' but this Philistine would be an ally of Egypt, where the people were acquainted with the compound

metal. His coat of mail would probably be like those of ancient Egypt, a kind of thorax-tippet or square, with an opening in it for the head, the four points covering the breast, back, and upper portion of the arms; we see this represented as used by Pharaoh's bodyguards. In the tombs of the kings at Thebes 'a trigulated hauberk<sup>1</sup> is represented, composed of three coloured pieces of metal, one golden, the others reddish and green, each piece a parallelogram, with the lower edge forming the segment of a circle, and each piece, besides the fastening, has a button and a vertical slit above it, giving flexibility by means of the button of each square working in the aperture of the piece beneath it.' Such, probably, was Goliath's 'coat of mail;' 'greaves,' too, were on his legs, where the upper armour did not shelter him. These greaves were often of skin (in this case metal), and bound round the calves and round the ankles; they reached usually only to the knees. The 'target,' between his shoulders, is more rightly translated 'javelin' in the Revised Version. In his hand he held a spear, the head of which was about eighteen pounds' weight, and the shaft so long and strong that it is compared to a weaver's beam. Borne in front by a soldier was the warrior's shield, the Egyptian form of which was broad and arched at the top, cut square below, bordered with metal, the surface covered with raw hide with the hair on; sometimes these skins were soaked in oil, and then dried to harden them; sometimes they were of hippopotamus hide or elephant skin. Such stood the Philistine champion, and as day by day he taunted the Israelites, and flaunted his height and strength, no wonder that men's hearts failed. It was no new thing for heathen armies to wish to settle a campaign

<sup>1</sup> A coat of mail without sleeves.

by the combat of single warriors — Homer relates the same of Paris, who wishes to meet Achilles in single combat—and these Philistines seemingly did not care to bring on a general engagement ; as they looked on their brass-clad champion, they felt as secure as did the American Southerners when their ironclad, *Merrimac*, steered straight for the *Cumberland*. Day by day this warrior sneers at the battle array of the Israelites ; proud of his race, he declines to acknowledge those opposed to him as his equals, in his eyes they are but the ‘servants of Saul ;’ and day by day, as they hear his proud challenge, his opponents decline the combat—they are ‘greatly afraid.’ Let us for a moment anticipate. There descends the hill to meet Goliath a young man, the bloom of youth on his cheeks ; his long red hair hangs in clusters on his neck, his dress is white ; one end of this shirt-like garment is tucked into the girdle, which is of skin or woven goat’s hair ; on his head a simple ‘kef-fiyeh’—a square of linen bound round the head by a cord of camel’s hair—the ends are loose and wave in the air as he descends the slope ; for arms he has a sling—a small flat piece of woven goat’s hair, attached to which are cords of the same material ; by his side hangs his scrip or bag, usually suspended from the girdle, sometimes thrust into the bosom where the shirt opens. He has a staff, and the usual shepherd’s club, formed of a root of some hard wood, with a handle about four feet long ; and this is the opponent of the armour-clad warrior ! Let us go back and see who this shepherd is, and how it is he comes to the battle array. Three of Jesse’s sons had been taken in the levy required to follow Saul (where the others were we are not told), and the old man was not only anxious to hear of them, but as the soldiers of an



1. SHEPHERD'S CLUB.

2. SHEPHERD'S STAFF.

3. SHEPHERD'S SLING.

Israelitish army had to victual themselves, he sends David with a supply of corn, about a bushel—roasted corn, as commonly eaten, and ten flat loaves. These loaves would be about 10 inches across and 3 inches in thickness, baked on a circular iron plate, the common bread of to-day in Palestine; for the captain in command of the Bethlehem contingent Jesse sends a delicacy,—curds of goat's milk. Some sort of zareba or fortification had been formed of the wagons, just such a one as our troops found necessary in Zululand and the Soudan. A commotion is going on; David finds that it is caused by the usual promenade of the Philistine champion. The gossips about tell how that the king had promised great riches and the hand of his daughter to whomsoever would be bold enough to confront and successful enough to slay the Philistine. Saul had offered the usual Eastern bribe—wealth and a wife! Easterns, like Westerns, are influenced by the desire for money, and with the Easterns it is still almost a crime for a young man to be unmarried,—‘bachelor’ is not an honoured name with them. Both these bribes had failed to tempt the bolder spirits of Saul's army. With the Easterns the marriage contract is usually entered into when young man and maiden are ignorant of each other; the father, or rather the mother, wills that her daughter shall marry a certain man, and the maiden is not consulted at all; so Saul did but follow the usual custom, and offered the hand of his daughter to any man who would rid him of his foe. It is clear that David was not influenced by either of these offers; he indignantly asks why no one had dared to slay this unbeliever, who had so insulted the Lord Jehovah? From group to group of soldiers goes the young shepherd seeking to rouse them; he asks if it can be true that the

king has tried in vain to get a champion? He preaches a fiery crusade, and his words have the effect of rousing the anger of his eldest brother. Probably, like Joseph, David was eyed enviously by his brethren, his daily life showing that he was influenced by a deeper faith and guided by a purer spirit than theirs. Eliab unjustly charges David with 'pride;' these taunts are, however, mildly put aside, and through the host goes the young missionary doing his best to raise the spirits of his countrymen. So strange a thing as that there should be *one* man who had no fear is reported to the king, who asks to see this man. Judge of his astonishment when the youth announces his intention of essaying the combat! David, reminded of his youth, warned how unequal is the combat, then shows that his courage comes from knowledge: he had slain a lion and a bear when they came to harry the sheepfold, and what enabled him? what gave him the skill and the power?—'the Lord!' Ah! here David rises superior to all—king or general, or soldiers—*they* had lost their faith; *his* was fresh, active, working.

He declines the mail armour offered him, he has his own plan, and prudently keeps his own counsel. He chooses five smooth stones—you may be sure he did it carefully: he 'chose' them shows he did not take them at random; and now across the opposite slope he goes. In the host of Israel many a heart beat high, and many a one would recall how Israel had been led in the past, and how by the hand of one, even Jonathan, the enemy had been defeated; in the Philistine host, too, curiosity would be mingled with dread, for so many of their conflicts with the Hebrews had been marked by signal defeats at the hand of one man—they would recall

Samson; and their leaders, too, felt that the people who had had that wonderful deliverance out of Egypt were in some especial sort of way under the protection of Jehovah. And now comes the Philistine: he is indignant, he curses, he boasts, he tries to terrify the youth, who then again proclaims his faith that he trusts not in himself but in the God of Israel. The adversary thought of close combat, but David had his own plan; he had had long practice as a shepherd in the art of slinging, for it was and is the common practice for shepherd-boys to admonish and guide the stragglers of their flocks by slinging stones at them. The moment has come—the proper distance at which he knows he can sling to a hair's-breadth—and then full in the forehead the stone strikes the giant, who, stunned, falls to the earth. Probably few of the Philistines were near enough to see the stone leave the sling; they saw the rush of David on their chosen warrior, whom they now saw headless, and again felt that the gods of the Hebrews fought against them. Panic-stricken, terrified by the wild shout of the advancing Israelites, the enemy fled to 'Shaaraim,' 'barley,' some well-known fields on the way to Gath; the fortress sheltered some, while others fled northwards to Ekron, 'the firm-rooted.' Zeph. ii. 4 says 'the firm-rooted one' shall be *rooted* up; at the present time 'Akir (Ekron), in Wâdy Sūrâr, the old site, has but two old wells to mark the stronghold. Tents, armour, all camp equipages fell into the hands of the victors; David, it seems, stayed by the body of Goliath and stripped off the armour; Abner, the chief captain, brings him before Saul, still with the grim proof of his victory in his hands.

There was one noble heart in the host of Israel—Jonathan. A bold and successful warrior himself, he loved

a kindred spirit, and such a one he saw in David ; a mutual affection at once sprang up between the young men. They exchanged garments, according to the usual Eastern method of expressing friendship.

All went well till, on the return of Saul and his army, the women in their songs placed David as a warrior before the king, and then anger rose in the heart of Saul ; the old illness, mania, again took possession of him, and jealously he watched and brooded. Soon his evil thoughts took shape. Knowing no law but his own wild will, he himself sought to slay the man he now hated, but failed ; he then lays traps, David is sent on dangerous service, and he is tricked as to his wife. The courtiers seek to sap the sturdy faith of the young hero, and finally Saul suggests a vile and savage dowry. One shudders as one thinks of David falling into this trap ; the bright eyes of Michal had blinded him to right feelings ; ambition, too, was entering into that youthful heart. He gains his bride ; his father-in-law only hates him the more. So mad, so blind is Saul, that he dares even to think that Jonathan will plot with him to slay David. He knows, madman though he may be, that his descendants are not to inherit the throne, and he hopes to ensnare his own son, and make him a partner in his crime, by telling him that while David lives he, Jonathan, can never come to the throne.

David seems to have fallen by consenting to execute the brutal demands of Saul. The times were barbarous, the Philistine enemy was a bold, unscrupulous, untiring foe ; and if they succeeded, then the plan of Jehovah for placing the Israelites in Palestine would be frustrated. Therefore, as bitter enemies, David would feel no compunction in warring against them day or night, by fair

means or by foul. And what examples had he? he, a boy reared in a village, a shepherd lad suddenly brought to a camp-life—for the court of Saul would be but the larger tent in a collection of militia. The life of camps at the best is a trying one for men. No wonder then that David had lost some of the simple grandeur of his shepherd life. But was there ever a finer character than Jonathan? himself one of the bravest of the brave, his heart leapt up to greet a man who, like himself, had the pluck to dare, and the skill to accomplish such a deed of daring—a very Bayard, Outram, Lawrence, or Gordon. Thank God, a host of men have ever lived in England who have worthily followed in the steps of Jonathan.

Without envy, Jonathan delighted in the successful forays of David, and does not care to conceal his admiration. He dares to warn his father, he reminds him of his servant's loyalty, he seeks to recall Saul's better self, he proclaims the innocence of his friend, and for the moment his arguments succeed; but David's success over the foe again steels the heart of Saul, and envy fires his breast. He attempts the life of the successful officer; failing, he then sets the menials of his court to watch and murder him, and had it not been for the love and wit of Michal, the plot would have succeeded. By a window David escapes; 'the window' would be one of those projecting balconies which Easterns build on the outer wall of their houses, a place to take the air in, and where, themselves unseen, they see the passers-by. To Ramah the hunted man goes; there his teacher (in Naioth or Nevaioth, 'dwellings,' some sort of college for priests) gives him refuge. Samuel, neglected, despised, lived there his quiet life, silently training up men who afterwards shed lustre on their times. Doubtless the old prophet

loved the youth, and now he would teach him more perfectly the way of the Lord. The 'world' of Israel thought they had nothing more to expect from Samuel, and therefore he was neglected and despised; but, in this quiet home, he was building up the character of one who would shine forth when the old prophet was lying in his grave. How long this time of rest continued, we cannot say; in time Saul hears of it, and he sends hirelings to take David, but the sight of the simple piety and adoration in this sanctuary makes them powerless; they, too, forsake their evil ways, and to successive bands the same thing occurs. Then the exasperated king goes himself. By the great well in Sechu, 'the hill,' he asks for David; but he, too, is seized with the Divine spirit, and casting off his kingly robes puts on the simple garments of the prophets, and becomes as one of them. David, knowing well enough now that Naioth is no safe refuge for him, flies to Jonathan for advice. A plan is concerted by which he is to be informed if Saul has really relinquished his murderous plans as to David. The brave man and trusty friend finds that he but risks his own life, and the foulest insult possible is launched at him; for, to an Eastern, nothing could be worse than to cast any reflection on his mother; this feeling is happily existent still. We have seen men, insulted in every possible way, bearing patiently until, as a last Eastern taunt, the name of their mother was aspersed, and then their anger blazed out, and would not be appeased. In hot anger, therefore, Jonathan spoke; in hot anger his father sought to slay him, and, therefore, Jonathan, good son as he was, is compelled to separate himself from the sinning king; yet in his own anger and sorrow he does not forget his friend, but warns him that all hope of

reconciliation is but vain. A touching scene of farewell takes place. These friends know well that probably never more can they hope to hold sweet converse together; the prince and the soldier mingle together their tears, and then part never more to meet, except by stealth. With no thought in his heart of rebellion, but only of safety, David flies in hot haste to Nob, a village of the priests—the site of which is doubtful, but by most experts thought to be a site two miles north of Jerusalem, and close to Scopus. Ahimelech, the priest, alarmed by his excited appearance, and the absence of any troops with the king's son-in-law, and probably well acquainted with the feelings of hatred Saul has for him, inquires the reason; and here we see that terror has mastered the fugitive, for he lies; he asks for bread—there is none but the shewbread, and this is given. Arms are also sought; and another lie follows.

Armed, however, with the sword of Goliath, David pursues his flight; he does not go to his home at Bethlehem: he feels that the hatred of Saul will follow him there, and he takes refuge in Gath—hoping that he is personally unknown to the ruler. But David had not led the forays so often that the soldiers of Gath could be ignorant of the red-haired leader of Israel; they had looked on him as the future king, and rumour had told them of the songs of praise sung by the Israelitish women in favour of him. It is not clear that Achish, king of Gath, would have harmed him; the laws of Eastern hospitality are so stringent that, even if an enemy takes refuge in a Bedawy's tent, the owner is bound by every sacred custom to shelter and defend the hunted man. David's nerves are unstrung, he has lived a hunted life, he fears imprisonment or death; quick-witted, he fains

idiocy, and shows the usual signs of a demented man. He knows well that an idiot was thought by all Easterns to be one under the especial protection of the gods; and if it be true, as Jewish tradition asserts, that Achish had insanity in his own family, David had good grounds for knowing that he would not be harmed. But Achish, thinking David really mad, has him turned out; so now he directs his flight to Adullam.

Opinions differ as to the site of Adullam, some authorities placing it at 'Aid el Mîyeh, east of Beit Jibrîn, on the border of the low country in the west of Judea; while others place it in Wâdy Khureitun, in the hill-country south, and near Bethlehem; the latter we think the true site. The gorge is wild, one of the grandest in Palestine, the approach to the caves being most difficult, and easy for a few men to defend. The caves are large, dry, and suitable for refuge, and, moreover, they are in Judah, to which tribe David belonged. As we saw long ago, Judah had never taken kindly to the rule of the Benjamite Saul; nor must we overlook that 'all David's father's house' knew of his retreat and visited him. Besides he, as shepherd, would have long ago explored the caves, for they were used in olden time, and are still now, as shelters for sheep in bad weather; from thence, too, there would be a well-known mountain-track over the En-gedi hills, and round the southern end of the Dead Sea to Moab, where we read David soon repaired. This he did in order to place his parents in safety, knowing well that Saul would soon destroy all his kindred, if they remained in Bethlehem. The relation of Jesse to Ruth, the Moabitess, would ensure the safety of himself and household in Moab. Tribal love and clanship, as well as hatred of Saul, soon brought David followers—all the

discontented, daring, restless spirits gathered round the captain whose praise was in every mouth.

In order to better understand the future movements of David, it will be well to devote a little space to the consideration of the country in which he and his band wandered. The extent was not great, hardly more than twenty miles from Bethlehem—a country of great variety, with wild hills, and wild ravines, a perfect network of hiding-places. The vegetation and water are scanty in some parts, in others quite absent. In places there is an arid desert, where the eye is blinded by glare and wearied by monotony, the rocks are hot, the sand is scorching, the sun glares in a sky unflecked by clouds, a shimmer of heat rises from the ground, distorting all objects—a very Sahara of desolation. The writer knows well what heat means in the valley of the Upper Nile or in the shut-in wâdies of the Sinai desert; but never did he feel the oppressive nature of heat, and the utter desolation of the land, so much as in an expedition made on foot with two Bedawin guides, when he spent some days sketching in portions of this country. In some of the steep wâdies there was a little rain-water in the pools, and here and there scanty vegetation, and now and then some bushes. Picture to yourself a sudden storm in that region—the distant hills blotted out by the rain, only the near brown and barren ridges to be seen, the gusts of wind sweeping up the sand and gravel, and filling the air; then down come the *cubes* of hail, which are caught up again by the fury of the wind, and dashed high above one's head; then the vivid *rose-coloured* lightning running along the ground, varied by flashes breaking down in zigzag lines from the upper sky, added to the sudden crackle of the thunder, and the rumbling echoes as the dread sound dies away

among the distant hills. Scenes such as these give one some idea of the perils of that country in which the hunted man lived; and surely it must have been at such times as these that he penned those lines of Psalm xviii. 7-15:—

‘Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth.

There went up a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.

He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under His feet.

And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind.

He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.

At the brightness that was before Him His thick clouds passed, hail-stones and coals of fire.

The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice; hail-stones and coals of fire.

Yea, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.

Then the channels of water were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at Thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils.’

## CHAPTER XI

### DAVID

#### 1 SAMUEL xxii.-xxxi.

Doeg's Treachery—The Slaughter of the People of Nob--The Meeting of David and Saul—Abigail—David in Philistia—The Battle at Gilboa—David King of Judah.

AS a shepherd, David would have explored all the country, known every retreat, every hidden spring of waters. The majority of the inhabitants, too, were on his side, both because he was of the tribe of Judah and because they looked to him—the conqueror over Goliath—as their future king and deliverer: his men would know the country, and they would have friends and relations to warn them or to assist when possible.

Spies surrounded every step which Saul made. True, he did get information again and again, but it was always too late. He tried to raise the tribal jealousy of his men, chiefly men of Benjamin, for did he not address them as 'Ye Benjamites'? He asks how can this 'son of Jesse' reward them? and, changing his note, he charges every one of them with conspiring against him. He does not hesitate to charge his loyal son with treachery, and foully says that he had stirred up his servant to lie in wait for him; and if ever there was a baseless, unfounded charge, this was. Saul's hatred, anger, and passion had deprived him of all reason.

A renegade from Edom, Doeg, then bears false witness against Ahimelech: he tells a lie—with a fragment of truth in it, ever the most dangerous of lies. Rage overpowers Saul; he will listen to no reason, and issues a fell command to his soldiers which they were manly enough to refuse to execute. None but this vile Edomite can be found to be the murderer of innocent men. The whole village of Nob is doomed to destruction, an order not unusual for an Eastern despot; the very sheep are slaughtered, and but one priest escapes; he is guided to the retreat, where David and his men listen with shrinking hearts to the tale of horror. David had dreaded to hear bad tidings; at the court of Saul he had rightly judged the character of Doeg, and probably enough the latter had secret enmity against the frank and open warrior. And now this remaining priest is a fugitive too.

News of a Philistine raid is brought to the outlaws' camp. Keilah, a site well known, and where a village called Kilah exists, is situated on the slopes of the Hebron hills in the great valley of Elah. The enemy comes up for the usual purpose—plunder; outside the village are the threshing-floors, where the harvest is being winnowed. Who tells David, and why he is told, we do not know; he, however, no sooner hears, than, like a brave soldier, he wishes to go to the rescue; but at this time of his life David does nothing of his own will, and therefore asks counsel of the Lord: the answer is a command to go. The men of the band, with some reason, object. They argue—We are in danger enough ourselves up here in these highlands; why should we go to the lower hills which are within reach of Saul? why should we increase the number of our enemies? Still the command is to go, and victory crowns the efforts of the band.

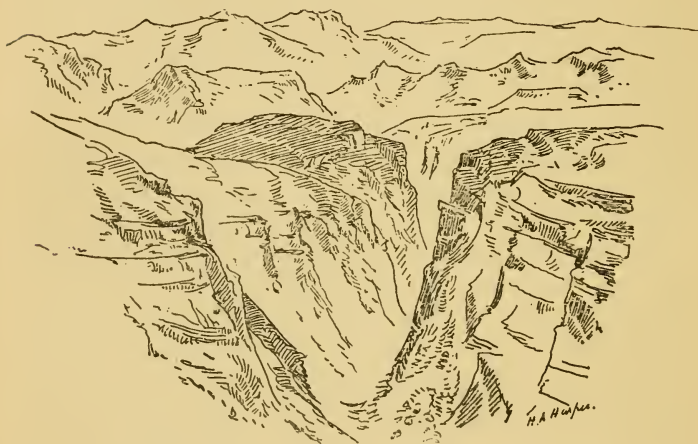
For themselves they get plunder and food, and they save the people of Keilah.

Saul soon hears of the occurrence, and he thinks he has caught David; for it would be easy to march from Gibeah to Keilah, whose people are often accused of ingratitude towards David; but we must remember they had the awful tragedy of Nob before their minds. If the city of the priests was not spared by the king, how could they hope to escape the rage of a despotic ruler? David and his band, now increased to six hundred men, therefore leave the shut-in valley. Where they go is not stated until we hear of a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph, probably a ridge in the desert southwards, and a day's march from Keilah, where the modern Tell Zif may represent the name—a region of desolate peaks, deep gullies, and endless caves, a place which even now is the resort of men who from any cause have offended the powers that be. It is close to that Jeshimon, 'solitude,' that waterless desert which sinks down to En-gedi and overlooks the Salt Sea, now called the Dead Sea, a region of barrenness and scanty thickets of white broom. Ibex and the desert-partridge still exist on its plains. Water is found only in the hollows amongst the rocky cliffs. None but hunted men would think of taking refuge in such a country.

Saul's soldiers must have had a harassing service, never knowing in those intricate ravines when they might not be assailed by the desperate men of David's band. That some of the people about knew of the exact place where the men were hidden is clear, for in the wood of Ziph (this probably was the isolated hill four miles from Hebron, which was overgrown with shrubs, and which from its height commanded a wide prospect), came

Jonathan, the brave fellow, to comfort his hunted friend. The place of meeting may have been near the present ruin of Khoreisah, which answers to the Choresch Ziph.

The presence of such a large band would be a great trial to the people of the surrounding country, for, doubtless, their exactions for food were very pressing, and to this, we presume, is due the fact that the Ziphites told Saul



THE ROCKS OF THE WILD GOATS.

of the whereabouts of David. He plans with them that their spies are to notice all the hiding-places and then that he will come. David is all but surrounded, the pursuit has been hot; the band are all but lost. Saul's men are hurrying round the ravines of Sela-Hammah-lekoth, when news of a Philistine raid is brought to the king, and he calls off his men. A deep gorge, an almost impassable defile, now called Wâdy Malâky, which was ever afterwards called 'the rock of divisions,' is the most likely place where the pursuers halted. David and his men

take refuge among the heights of En-gedi, in the which is the ravine where still exists the oasis, the 'Fountain of the Kid;' here a region of the very wildest ravines borders on the Dead Sea.

We know of no scenery in Palestine to compare with this for wildness and grandeur; the walls of rocks are all but perpendicular, the ravines so narrow you can speak to a man across them, and yet to reach him would take hours of dangerous descent and climbing. The bases of the ravines are smooth and water-worn from winter torrents, here and there are deep rainpools, with water of an intense blue. We found it impossible to walk in these ravines with boots on, so smooth were the water-worn surfaces. Vegetation (except at the oasis) there is none. Caves abound; in after-years Christian hermits took up their abodes in this 'Valley of Fire,' so called by the Arabs,—such are these rocks of the wild-goats.

The shepherds as usual made use of the caves for sheltering their flocks, and it is here that Saul is in danger of his life, for, going suddenly out of the blazing sunshine into the deep shade, he does not see that the very man he is hunting is already in the cave. What a chance for David! so easy to end all his troubles. The low but eager whispers of his men but echo the thought in his heart that this is the Lord's doing. Only for a moment could the brave warrior have been troubled with so base a thought that he should slay his enemy. He *will not* take the law into his own hand; he cannot raise his hand against the Lord's anointed. Here, in the moment of temptation, David's character is grand. In ignorance of his peril the king departs—he had been alone—and now, bowing his head with stately homage, David shows the king how, had he

been the kind of man he was accused of being, nothing would have been easier than to slay the king. He gives Saul a glimpse of the faith that rules his life. He knows that God rules; to Him he leaves his cause. As at the outburst of the sun the mists of night roll away, so the goodness of David melts the heart of the king. Such a thing had been unheard of before. With a frankness born of this better moment Saul tells out his whole heart, and admits he is convinced that David will be king. All he asks is that his name and race may not be blotted out. A promise of this sort was easy for David to give; he had at this time no sordid ambition. King and subject part in peace—Saul to his camp and court at Gibeah, David to his hold; and for a time the band has nothing to fear from Saul.

They hear the news of Samuel's death, but are unable to be present at the funeral. Probably to obtain food David now leads his men to the wilderness of Paran, which from the regions about Beer-sheba extended to Sinai. In this wilderness they probably lived a life much like that of their forefathers in the Exodus, or like the Bedawin of to-day. Though now barren, yet this desert shews evident traces of having at one time contained towns of some size, for wells, forts, and old beams of wood were found in quantity when this limestone region was explored by the late Professor Palmer.

This 'Desert of the Wanderings,' or, as it is now called, the 'Desert of the Tih,' is, however, very little known. Probably because of the summer heat, David was living on the confines of Maon, where it is still the custom to take the flocks and herds for pasture. The band had lived on good terms with the shepherds who herded the flocks belonging to the rich sheep-farmer Nabal. It was the

time of sheep-shearing,—a time of feasting, and the band longed for some of the good things their friends were enjoying. While camped in this district David had kept his men from plundering, and, as was the custom, he expected some acknowledgment for the good services they had rendered in making the shepherds secure from the wandering tribes of Amalekites and others. A respectful embassy is therefore sent: they ask for whatever it pleases the farmer to give. Unwisely and churlishly he replies by a taunt:—‘too many servants break away from their masters,’ says he—a cry re-echoed by bad and stingy masters to-day. After-events suggest, however, the thought that, as he was an old man, he may have been jealous of the handsome outlaw. Otherwise, why is it noticed that Abigail, his wife, was so beautiful? The man’s servants speak well of the services rendered, and, like wise men, when they see the storm brewing, go to their mistress, who sees at once that no time is to be lost. She is kindly disposed to David, and knows also that in the event of a quarrel she and her husband would be quite at his mercy; she is, moreover, quick-witted enough to know that the leader of such a band is not one to put up with an insult. With a truly royal gift she sets out, sending servants in advance to apprise David of her coming. She is none too soon; at the foot of the hill she meets David, who is in an angry mood. The wife spares not her husband, says he is truly called a ‘fool,’ and cleverly appeals to the piety of David. A very clever speech from a beautiful woman is not a thing David could resist; she appealed to his piety, flatters his vanity, in short, he became like wax in her hands. Moreover, he hints, and very clearly too, that some day she shall be more to him. Events move on rapidly.

Nabal, feasting and drunk, is quite ignorant of all that his wife has done. When the morning light rouses him from his debauch, then he is told; he is seized with a fit, either of fear or passion; ten days after, he is dead. Short is the courtship, scant is the mourning, and no sorrow for the departed interferes with David's demand that Abigail shall be his wife. Had he been content, he would have been happy; but now, rich through Abigail's wealth, he follows the custom of his time and takes another wife. After-events will show how fatal to his fortunes and character this was.

Why David revisits the country of the Ziphites in the Negeb, 'the dry,' is uncertain. He may have wished to be near the property of his rich wife. In Paran he was safe, for he was over the border. Now he is again in danger; the Ziphites tell Saul. It may be that the king thought that this approach to his frontier was but the prelude to an attack; he was suspicious of his people. So from his camp at Gibeah he moves up with 3000 chosen men to watch and capture David. The hill of Hachilah, as we have already seen, was on the edge of the desert 'Solitude,' and the ridge El Kolah was probably the site of the camp. David's spies keep him well informed of all movements. He sees the camp; so, as night comes on, taking two of his bravest adherents, he proposes to inspect the foe. Saul has formed a 'zareba,' probably of the rude camp wagons and the brushwood. The position of the chief is always conspicuous; erect in the ground is his tall spear, just as with the Arabs of to-day; there, too, is the usual leathern bottle of water, close to hand. Probably the visit was paid at that early hour when, out of doors, Easterns enjoy their soundest sleep. They will chatter and keep watch till midnight: nothing



EL KOLAH.

seems ever to teach them that it is in the early dawn that danger and attack ever come. He who has travelled much in Eastern lands can say that Easterns have learned nothing in this respect. Every Bedawin raid, every foray, owes its success chiefly to this want of morning watch. Saul's men had had a long and fatiguing march, harassed, too, by the thought that they had always failed in former expeditions. And now to David again comes the suggestion from others that he should end all this worry. He refuses, and leaves his cause to God; but he takes spear and bottle, and, when across the ravine, he shouts to the commander of the body-guard—taunts, reproaches him. Doubtless it was a bitter moment for that soldier to find that, through his own carelessness and that of his sentinels, the outlaw had so flaunted him; by this time he ought to have known how skilful David was when full of expedients. The noise arouses the king; he hears and recognises the figure of his son-in-law, standing against the pale light on the sky line. Saul again admits his wrongdoing, repeats that he is certain that David will prevail, and each man goes to his own place.

David now loses heart: no longer a single man, he has his wives to think of; his men had theirs; and again he makes a false step—he will go to his enemy the Philistine.

Achish, the son of the king at that time, had, it seems, a warrior's respect for David. All this reads like the story of to-day. The emigration of tribes is quite a common event. The Turks themselves gave land to Circassians and to Bulgarians in the Lejjah, across the Jordan, when those nations were evicted by the Russians; and Ziklag, which Achish gave to David, was on the frontier from which the Philistines had to fear attack. The 'Shasu,' as the Egyptian papyri call them, 'Bedawin' their

modern name, were on this border, and never rested quiet. So to Ziklag David goes. The place is probably represented by the ruins 'Aslûj in the desert south of Beersheba—and here David becomes a power, for rumour has spread abroad his fame. Disaffection, too, is increasing in the kingdom of Saul, so deserters from the army come to Ziklag, even men of Benjamin, Saul's own tribe. Strangers arrive, and even from distant Gad come a host—tried warriors who delight in war; they come from over Jordan, and though it is the flood-time they swim or ford that river, a feat none but the most daring and powerful men could do,—not that the river is so broad, but that at flood-time it pours down, a dirty rushing torrent. They cut their way through all opposition, defeating the forces sent to arrest them. Many of these fresh comers are Saul's own relations, and David at first suspects them; but they pledge their oaths and are received into David's band. Skilful captains of war are there too, and, strengthened by them, he goes distant expeditions and flushes his men.

The Geshurites, Gezerites, and Amalekites are the foes that Egypt dreaded, and to keep out them she built 'Shur,' the wall. Whenever David brought back spoil he tells his friend Achish that he had gone to attack the Kenites. The Philistine had no objection that these people should be destroyed: they were allied to the Hebrews; it only, so he thought, bound David closer to him that he should harry friends. David's policy was barbarous, deceitful; he had fallen from his high estate; he had become a politician, and said the things he meant not. Wealth and power had sapped his faith; he had been sorely harassed by Saul; and the dread that anything should happen to his wives and his men had made him

doubt the power and the willingness of God to protect him. Before he went up to Keilah in the old days, he asked counsel of the Lord. Now 'David said in his heart;' yes, the poor tried man looked to himself, knowing, as he was ever the first to admit, how weak he was. He feared to trust, and this false step led him to all those other false steps, and so he goes deeper and deeper into the mire. Yes, we can see that; but remember the swan may fall into the mire and sully her whiteness, but she will soar from it and, cleansing herself in the pure stream, will again shine forth white as snow. In this wrath and anger of David against those old foes, we see his fire of indignation against men who delighted to torment, to oppress. Those robbers lurked in their dens only to issue forth when they could murder the innocent, ravish the poor, and make slaves of the children. That those who take the sword shall perish by the sword if that sword is drawn to sustain wrong, is a truth that all history teaches; God's chariot-wheels may seem sometimes to tarry, and the high and powerful tyrants flourish for long, but the day of the Lord comes, and then utter destruction sweeps over the guilty rulers and their race.

The distracted state of Saul's kingdom had not escaped the eyes of the ever-watchful foe. Consequently, no longer for a raid, but for a great effort to crush the Israelites, Achish musters his hosts. He by this time seems to be king and ruler of that city which was the key of Philistia. He wishes David to go too, for now that leader has indeed a valuable and tried force. David seems to have made no objection, and he is promised that he shall be captain of the king's body-guard—no new thing for an Eastern ruler to trust himself to men who were not of his own country.

The two previous great attacks of the Philistines had been through the hills, one by way of Michmash, the other through the pass or valley of Elah. Defeated each time, they are wiser now, and gather themselves for their supreme effort. They go by way of the sea-board, gathering strength from Ashdod and Ekron; as they pursue their march northwards along the plain of Sharon, they turn eastwards, after crossing the hills near Megiddo, and so enter the plain of Megiddo or Jezreel. Why they made this long march is not stated. It may have been that as they were strong in chariots and horsemen, and the Israelites were deficient in both, the Philistine leaders wished to keep to ground suitable for the action of their forces; or it may have been that their objective point was the Jordan fords at the foot of Gilboa, and that the effort was to turn Saul's flank and cut his kingdom in half.

They pitch in Shunem, a slight ridge on the great plain, its back to the hill of Moreh and Tabor, and facing Gilboa. Saul takes up his position on Gilboa, at the foot of which is the well-known spring 'Ain Jalûd, 'the water of trembling.' Why he did not fall back and take a stronger position in the defiles of the hills to his rear we do not know. He had, so to speak, a double front to defend: on the west he faced the plain, and the north the Philistine camp. Gilboa itself was a strong position; but from the Philistines choosing the open ground at Shunem, it shows that they felt confidence in their superior numbers. Their cavalry could secure their flanks. Gilboa is a long ridge or range of barren hills, quite ten miles long, running up to about six hundred feet above the plain. Jezreel is the west, and Bethshan the eastern extremity. It separates the southern plain of Jezreel from the central portion,

which slopes between Gilboa and the hill of Moreh to the valley of the Jordan. It would seem that the attack was from the north. Both flanks were, as we have seen, open to attack, and there was no line of retreat, for the steep sides of Gilboa would prevent that.

From the high ground Saul could see the disposition of the enemy's forces. He had sufficient military skill to comprehend, when too late, the false position he had chosen. He loses heart, and again makes the mistake of assuming to combine the offices of king and priest by himself 'inquiring of the Lord.' He obtains no answer, and then the doomed man still further plunges into the dark: he asks for a woman who has 'a familiar spirit.'

Witchcraft was forbidden in Exodus xxii. 18; it says: 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.' It is impossible in the scope of this book to enter into the question of divination. Saul's long night-walk from Gilboa, over the hill of Moreh, and down to Endor; the distressing circumstances of his visit there; his tramp back, certainly had not fitted him for the contest on the morrow.

But where was David all this time, what part was he playing? As the Philistine hosts had proudly marched on, probably in parade before the chiefs, it was soon seen that close to the king came David and his desert warriors. Stern questions are asked. No wonder; the person of David was well known, and the special offence seems to have been those 'servants' (1 Sam. xxix. 10), who had so recently joined. Those 'mighty men,' those men of Gad, of Benjamin, and the other captains, would all be well known to the Philistine captains, and they had good reason to object. They were about to make a supreme effort; was it wise to have in their rear, forming a corps of reserve, a band of men alien to themselves—men who had

hitherto been their worst and most stubborn opponents? And how easy for David, if the fight went hard, to take the head men of Saul's body-guard, now deserters, and at some critical moment go over to his king, and so make peace for himself by betraying the Philistine cause and bringing the deserter for punishment! It was sound and unanswerable logic. Achish himself may have had full confidence in David, and to the last he spoke up bravely for his friend. But he was but one of a league, he had not supreme command, and he was forced to listen to and comply with the arguments and remonstrances of others; and so David was saved from the sin of warring against his own countrymen. When this separation took place we are not told, only that David goes back home. And here, from the text, we see that his force was chiefly a camel corps. He had captured camels from the Amalekites, and had marched from the desert to assist Achish. So now, chafing, angry, he makes a forced march homewards—and none too soon.

The Amalekites had not been blind to what had happened; their spies had told of the march of all the able-bodied men, obeying the call to arms from Achish which had rung through all the countryside. Now, with one of those swift forays for which the desert warriors were famous, they had swept down on Ziklag, captured it, burnt it, and carried all the women away, slaying none—all were prisoners. This points to the idea that what they sought was ransom, not revenge. While the women were in their power they could treat with David.

What a home-coming! The hearts of David's men had never been in this expedition with Achish; now grief overpowers their reason. Wives and children lost, and all through the ambition of the chief—so argue the men

and their leader's life is in danger from their anger. It was a critical moment; but when in trouble David turned to the Lord. There is nothing peculiar in this; even bad men, when in danger of their lives, will utter a prayer to the God they neglected in health and prosperity. This trial, however, but brings back David to his better self. He does not now consult his 'own heart,' he asks the appointed priest for the counsel and advice of God. 'Pursue, overtake, and you will recover all,' is the encouraging answer.

And so the weary warriors again set off. They had thought to rest in their homes; and now they have to start on a mission of revenge. His six hundred trained desert warriors go with David. We hear nothing of the other men who had so lately joined him, and we shall see the reason later on. Every nerve is strained; they have had a long and fatiguing march; and now it is to be a forced march, night and day, and soon we hear of men falling out. As we before said, David's force would be a camel corps, or dromedary force; for in the East the camel is the beast of burden—the cart-horse—while the dromedary is the hack or race-horse.

To realise at all what this forced march must have been, one must have traversed the land: known what it means to be *thirsty*; hunger is bad enough to bear—but thirst, under a burning sun, the ground hot, the whole earth a furnace, nothing to interest, nothing to beguile the weary way, a *white* heat in the sky (none of the blue which northerners are so fond of painting in their representations of the desert); this was beyond the endurance of the force, and they gave in, and two hundred stayed behind.

The writer recalls one of his own experiences in that same desert. A boy and a camel were sick; it would

have been death for them to have tried to push on ; they were left at the oasis with a very small portion of food, in the hope that, ere long, wanderers like ourselves would come to that desert oasis and help the lad, if living. But many a time at home has the thought of that lad, and his patient look of perfect resignation, crossed our minds ; but to have taken him on would have been death to him.

At some unmentioned and unknown oasis a starving man is found. He is an Egyptian slave, left by the Amalekites to die or recover, as would be the case even now ; figs and raisins dried are given him (the late Sir William Gull, one of the most successful doctors of this age, always took dried raisins when much fatigued), for this poor fellow had had nothing for three days and three nights ; either he was too sick to crawl to the water or the 'brook Besor' was dry ; it was probably one of those many wâdies which cross this desert, at one time a flood, impassable, then slippery from mud, and then dry—a common thing in the country of which we are speaking.

When revived the stranger is questioned ; he is no Amalekite, but a slave ; he tells of the raid. No wonder Achish had wished that David should guard his frontier on this side. The sick man is fed, and when somewhat restored the question is : 'Which way did the raiders go ?' Gratitude to his deliverers prompts him to swear he will lead the avenging band. A skilful tracker in the desert will notice signs which to other men mean nothing ; he will even, as we have seen, be able to tell of which tribe the passers-by are composed, for, strange to say, the great tribes of the Arabian desert have distinct modes of walking, the one being flat-footed and the other walking with a springing gait.

The camp of the invaders is reached. They are scat-

tered abroad; well they knew, when they planned their raid, of the march of the Philistine army, and well they knew, too, that David also had marched; therefore, what



AN AMALEKITE TO-DAY.

was there to fear? Eating, drinking, and dancing round the camp-fires were the desert warriors, just as they would be to-day; for the Arab customs change not, and however

tired your Bedawy is by the march, when the evening falls he is ready for song and dance.

The dim light of evening conceals the scanty numbers of the attacking band. Though surprised, yet these desert warriors make a good fight of it; the struggle continues all through the night and through the next day, till on the approach of evening some four hundred of the foe, mounted on their swift dromedaries, make their escape. Wives, children, are all recovered. Rich plunder of flocks had they; and David, in opposition to some grumblers, decrees that those tired men who had stayed by the baggage are to share—it is to be share and share alike. And then to all those people who had succoured him when in want, to all those on whose ground he had camped, the great chief sends a welcome present. The list is a long one, and it enables us to see who had been friendly to the outlaws. Scant time had the victors for rejoicing, for soon there came riding into the camp a stranger—with rent clothes and dust on his head, betokening a bearer of bad tidings; an Amalekite, a fugitive from the camp of Saul, he gasps out his tale. He has no connected story to tell, and what he does tell is afterwards found to be partly untrue; he had hoped for a great reward, and therefore he boasted, and claimed to have played a very important part in the battle.

How this battle commenced we know not; but in all probability the Philistines launched their chariots and cavalry upon the footmen of Israel, who were drawn out on the plain at the foot of Gilboa; their ranks once broken, escape was impossible, for up the grassy slopes of the lower ranges of the hills there was no shelter, and the formidable Philistine archers, with their shafts, as long and as deadly as those of the English archers at

Cressy, poured in a deadly shower. The king, wearing rich armour, and a crown on his head, was an especial mark; he was wounded sore. Round him had fought his sons, among them the brave Jonathan, who had clung to his sinning father when he was in distress, and who met the same fate. It was a deadly defeat. The men of Israel seem to have been placed some on Gilboa, some on the hill of Moreh, across the valley, and the flight went on to right down the valley and the Jordan fords near Bethshan. Panic-struck, the people of the villages on the hills and across the Jordan forsook their strongholds and left all to the foe. David's men were outlaws, and yet the hearts of all were sound: they disliked Saul, but they loved their country—as patriots, they could not but grieve. The messenger had brought crown and bracelet to prove his story—out of his own mouth he was judged, he had slain the Lord's anointed one, and therefore his reward was death.

David, famous singer as he was, surpassed himself in the song of wailing for his loved friend Jonathan; noble-hearted, too, he forgets all the past misery Saul has caused him, and thinks of the king as he first saw him—a mighty man of valour. Seldom has there been seen such perfect friendship and love between man and man as that between David and Jonathan, and worthily has it been recorded. The enemy, as was usual, treat the bodies of the fallen princes with ignominy; there are, however, some grateful men left. From across Jordan brave men remember how Saul rescued them, and they take the poor mangled bodies and give them decent burial.

Now arises another great crisis in David's life: what is he to do? Thereupon he asks counsel of God. He is told not to stay in the ruins of Ziklag, but to go to Hebron.

This, the great city of his tribe, welcomes him and his band, and at once makes him king over Judah. His first royal message is one of thanks to those brave warriors of Jabesh-gilead. Why the Philistines did not follow up their victory is not stated—probably there is some great gap here in the history; or it may have been that, as they saw the kingdom was divided, they had no objection to two weak states on their borders; or was it that the friendship Achish had for David caused him to establish a truce? Abner, commander-in-chief to Saul, escaped the slaughter at Gilboa, and adhered to the fallen dynasty. Part of the country across Jordan, even part of Galilee and all Benjamin, acknowledge the rule of Ish-bosheth, Saul's successor in Israel, while for more than seven years David reigns over the tribe of Judah.

## CHAPTER XII

### DAVID THE KING

#### 2 SAMUEL i.-xiii.

Abner and Joab—Jerusalem—David's Wars—Mephibosheth—Bathsheba—Absalom.

WHEN two people are unfriendly, and are chafing at each other, accidents will often provoke a deadly breach of the peace. In the case of the Israelites, it does not appear that either side liked to begin the quarrel. Abner was probably on a tour of inspection, and close to the frontier; Joab on his part was watching him by the great pool of Gibeon. They meet—each band must have water; and as there was at present no particular cause for fighting, they sit down, the one band on one side, and the other band opposite them. The same sort of truce is often related of the French and English forces when in the battle-grounds of the Peninsula. Then, thirst satisfied, Abner proposes a display of swordsmanship; Joab is nothing loth. What began in play turns to fight in earnest, for the combatants slay each other. A general fight follows, in which David's men are the conquerors. A fast runner, Asahel singles out Abner—will not be denied; he is young and ambitious, he hopes that his right hand may end the matter and slay the general of Ish-bosheth, whom all men know was but a puppet, and

that Abner was the uncrowned king. It strikes one that Abner was generous; he was unwilling to harm the youth; he suggests that there are others who would be an easy prey. The reckless young runner cannot listen or curb his ambition; the doughty Abner disdains to use his sword or spear, but with disdain thrusts back the heavy shaft; its hinder end was shod with an iron spike, to make it stick in the ground. Asahel evidently had no armour; thrust through the ribs he fell down dead. Horror at the death of their captain's brother made the soldiers of David arrest their steps until Joab and the others came up. But now the pursued had gathered themselves together, and from a hill-top remonstrated with Joab on the bitterness of the pursuit. Abner evidently did not wish that the Israelites should break into open war.

Where Ammah, 'hill of the aqueduct,' and Giah, 'ravine,' were, is unknown; they were some points on the way to the wilderness, for the beaten men were making for the Jordan fords. All night long did they plod on, and a weary way it is through that plain of Jordan. Where Bithron, 'the broken ground,' was, is also unknown. There has been some dispute as to the position of Mahanaim, 'two camps' or 'two hosts.' One thing is clear, it was a day's journey from the Jabbok, and Mahneh seems to be the most likely site. There is still existing a fountain, a fine pool, ruins of buildings, now grass-covered.

The rash act of the young man Asahel brought on war between the divided Israelites. Victory, however, always inclined to David, who has taken another wife. Her father was king of Geshur, whose territory was near the source of the Jordan in the far north. This was probably a political marriage to ensure that David, who was strong

in the south of Judah, should have friends in the far north, Saul's adherents holding the middle part of the land.

A quarrel between Abner and the weak king Ish-bosheth about a woman roused the ire of the general. He taunts Ish-bosheth with owing his position as king entirely to his, Abner's, efforts, and says that he himself is powerful enough to make David king over the whole land. It shows the weak nature of the king that he allows his subject to insult him with impunity. Abner does not indulge in idle threats; he at once opens negotiations, and offers to bring over to David all Israel as a test of his own power and sincerity. David requires that Michal, his first wife, should be restored to him; he still seems to have cared for his first love. Her second husband had to yield to force, for he loved his wife. Her sentiments are not chronicled.

Abner, if not successful in war, is yet evidently a power. He is an orator too; he speaks to an assembly of the elders, recalling to their minds that David was chosen by the Lord. With the Benjamites also he pleads; his arguments are successful. Abner was a politician; he could easily turn round, and argue for the very side he for years has been fighting against. It was not until he had quarrelled with his own sovereign that he cared to remember that David was the anointed one. With but a body-guard of twenty men he now comes to David at Hebron. He is well received, a great feast is held in his honour, and he starts back to keep his compact. Joab and the men of war were absent; they had evidently been combating a band of the old foe, the Amalekites. Successful, they return filled with elation and rich with spoils. Joab bluntly tells David that he looks on Abner as a spy—really Joab

was furious at the death of his brother, and jealous, too, of the skill and tact of Saul's old general. Joab not being a man to brook a possible rival, secretly pursues Abner, who with his band was halting at the well of Sirah. That well exists now, and is called 'Ain Sârah; it is near Hebron, on the main road north of the city.

Unsuspecting any duplicity, Abner has reached the gate of the city, when Joab meets him and takes him away as if to talk privately to him, and then foully murders him, pleading the necessity of blood-revenge. A proud, ambitious, and passionate man like Joab overlooked, to gain his own ends, that Asahel had fallen in war. Joab would have been within his rights if he had sought Abner in war and rested not day or night to slay him. But here Abner had come in peace; he had gone away in safety, after being honoured by his sovereign; he had been tempted back on the plea that Joab had matters of importance to arrange with him, and then, without one word of warning, he was foully slain.

On David's part there is a lack of vigour; had he not dreaded the power of Joab, he, the king, would have been the first to punish the criminal, and not have contented himself with cursing Joab and ordering a fast. David wishes publicly to clear himself of all complicity in the murder. He weeps at the grave, he fasts, he utters a lament, and his people understand that his hands are clean; but truly, as he said himself, he was 'weak;' a king loved by his subjects, he should have been a terror to evil-doers. Still, as David's power grew, that of Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, diminished. It does not appear that up to this time the treaty of peace proposed by Abner had been carried out; indecision marked the rule of the sister kingdom.

A passing glimpse of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth reveals a story of suffering: a little child when the fatal battle of Gilboa takes place, his nurse snatches him up, puts him on her shoulders, and hurries away; the child falls and becomes a cripple for life. Then follows another sad story: Ish-bosheth is taking the usual nap in the heat of day, when two traitors slay him, for greed of gain, and, quite misreading the character of David, hurry with the gory head to Hebron. David now lets his good heart and sense of justice do the right: he points out to all that if he slew the Amalekite who brought tidings of the death of Saul, thinking to please him, how much more, when wicked men slay a righteous man, should he require the blood of the slayer? Another murderer is punished; the body-guard execute the criminals and hang up portions of their bodies as a warning to traitors. We may object that this was brutal and debasing, but the times were so; and what shall we say then of our own rulers, for it is not so many years ago that in Christian England the heads of traitors were hung on Temple Bar! The head of Ish-bosheth is buried with full honours.

The next step is the long-delayed consolidation of the tribes. They form a *constitutional* monarchy, for 'King David made a *league* with them in Hebron.' The union did not escape the notice of the Philistines, whose leaders foresaw danger if Israel became united, and they knew enough of David to know that he was a ruler to be feared. They are prompt, and their leaders always seem to have been shrewd politicians as well as brave soldiers. Before the new ruler can consolidate his forces they invade the country, and in such force that Hebron becomes no safe place for the king; he has to leave it to its fate while he takes refuge in his old stronghold of Adullam. Spreading

northwards, the enemy overrun the plain of Rephaim, which, fertile then as now, would yield them supplies. This movement shows, too, that either Bethlehem had fallen or was passed, for the plain lies between the Bethlehem hills and Jerusalem. This formidable invasion was so far successful that David was cut off from the northern part of his kingdom; but that it was only a great raid we may gather from the words describing it: "They came and *spread* themselves." Scattered abroad, busy securing the crops, they were attacked by David near by some old heathen place of sacrifice. Where this high place is we cannot say, but it was to have a new meaning from henceforth. So sudden was the attack, so complete the defeat, that the enemy left behind them their cherished idols, which David burnt in the fire.

Again at the usual season another powerful raid takes place. Again the Philistines occupy the plain of Rephaim, and this time their forces extended far northwards to Gibeon. Encouraged by a sign from the Lord, David makes a long detour, and attacking that flank of the enemy, defeats them, and pursues them through the hill passes to Gath.

The 23d chapter of Second Samuel gives us more details of feats of bravery on the part of David's captains and mighty men. It also tells how at this time a garrison of the enemy held Bethlehem. Like an Eastern, David longed for water from the well of his native village. So expert are Easterns that they will frequently tell where the water comes from which a traveller gives them to drink; especially, too, are they all fond of their own village spring; David sighs for the Bethlehem water. Three of his soldiers have overheard his desire; they break through the enemy's guard, and, obtaining a skin

of water, offer it to their beloved chief. He, soldier-like, is touched by their devotion, and shows his men how he can forego the luxury, and, like them, endure thirst. He offers the water as a sacred offering to the Lord.

David now feels that the time has come when he should no longer tolerate the presence of a hostile race in the stronghold of Jebus (afterwards called Zion), really the most central as well as the strongest position in the whole land. So secure do these old dwellers on the rock feel, that they taunt the invading force. David's desert warriors were brave—daring to the last degree, but they had no war engines, no battering rams; their experience was of desert wastes, of rocky ravines, sudden forays, or desperate single combats. All this experience was worthless against stone walls, for Jebus had a castle on its summit. The rock was steep; even now it towers over Moriah, where the Temple was afterwards built, and it was in olden days surrounded on three sides by deep valleys. The lower hills had been occupied by the Israelites since the days of Joshua; but the citadel was a virgin fortress, and it was not till later years that the Israelites acquired any skill in capturing fortresses. We see quite late in David's reign how one of his most skilful captains bemoans his want of ability to take a walled city. Hushai says the only way to capture it was to pull down the walls with ropes!—flank movements, or sudden attacks are useless here, and David knew enough of Jebus to understand that blockade would entail years of watchful warfare. He himself has no plan to propose; he does not call a council of war or take advice from Joab, but declares 'that whosoever getteth up to the gutter' shall be chief of his army. What was this 'gutter'? Some far-seeing Hittite or Ammonite had

designed that a subterranean passage from the inside of the city should be cut through the rock to the spring below, so that in troublous times, when the daughters of Zion could no longer venture outside the gates to draw water from the fountain, the needful supply would be obtainable without the knowledge of the besiegers and without risk to the besieged. For what enemy would attempt the all but impossible feat of diving along a water-course for seventy feet, and then climbing fifty feet up the smooth sides of a vertical rock-cut shaft?

Somehow David knew of this 'gutter,' hence his offer. How the ascent was done the Bible does not say, but the records of the Palestine Exploration Fund<sup>1</sup> tell how Sir Charles Warren and Sergeant Birtles managed to ascend this hidden passage. Joab, able, skilful as he was, must, we think, have had a confederate in Jebus, and it is at least curious to note that, long after the fortress was taken, a Jebusite, Araunah, is found in possession of valuable land just under Jebus. Was he the secret adviser? If we turn to 1 Chronicles xi. 6, we see that Joab was the one who first went up, and so he was confirmed in his office as commander-in-chief. Ever since the murder of Abner, David had chafed at Joab's supremacy, and his offer to make any one chief who captured the citadel seems to have been dictated by the hope that possibly some bold spirit might arise and enable him to depose Joab. The capture of this position was all-important: it gave the new king a central position, for Jebus lay well out of the great highway between the two great empires of Egypt and Assyria. Its position was on the great backbone of the chain of hills which run through the land, and therefore was not liable to sudden surprise. Hebron was too

<sup>1</sup> *The Recovery of Jerusalem.*

far south, and too open to the valleys which led to Philistia, to be a good capital; besides, Jebus had a fort or castle.

David strengthens and enlarges the outside defences; and now he has a citadel. This capture consolidated his power, it was the turning-point of the new monarchy; and so his fame soon spread abroad. Hiram, king of Tyre, an old Phœnician city on the sea, was an astute monarch; he well understood that it was as well to be on friendly terms with the new power, which showed such prowess. The conquests of David over the strong fortress had cleared the kingdom of its oldest foe. The Philistines on the south-west had been completely defeated; their idols burnt, and they had not retaliated. Moabites, Edomites, and nations far to the north had felt the weight of David's arm, and therefore the Phœnician king considers it advisable to send an embassy. He hears that David is building; so he sends him timber-trees of great value and skilful operatives, men famed over the whole East for their skill; they soon build David a 'house' or palace. Hiram knew well that the Israelites could give him in return just what he wanted—oil, corn, wine,—for these old sailors of Phœnicia had little land of their own; in fact they rather despised it, and looked to their commerce with other nations to supply all their needs. Phœnicians always required to be 'nourished' by other nations.

Having now a fit centre for the military and political power of his kingdom, David determines to make it also the chief religious centre; so with great pomp the Ark, which so long had been in an obscure village, is now to be brought to Zion. Uzzah suffers from his presumption; he is too officious; and the great ceremony is delayed.

Another attempt is made; a high festival follows, and David, elated, casts off his robes as king and attires himself as a simple priest, sinking the political capacity in that of the religious leader. It offends the taste of his first wife. Doubtless she had resented his having many wives. She saw herself, a royal princess who had married beneath her, passed by, and with the bitter tongue of an enraged woman she taunts her husband: he has bemeaned himself to the 'handmaids'—a covert taunt against Abigail and the others. David is in no humour to listen; he says it is right that he should acknowledge that he owes all his success to the favour of the Lord; but declares that no offspring of the past king has a right to say that he owes anything to Saul or his line. His anger continues after the great function, and poor Michal goes to her grave a childless woman. Hers was a hard fate. She had truly loved her husband; had saved his life; she saw others preferred before her, and her woman's resentment overcame her prudence. The unthinking words of an angry woman gave her life-long misery.

Full of religious thoughts, the king now proposes to show his gratitude by building a fit Temple for the Lord. It was a proper thought. It was not right that he who had been a simple shepherd should dwell in a costly palace while the Ark should have its simple covering. The thought did David honour; his example is one men should follow. Though his proposal was not accepted, yet a great honour was promised to him and his children. David's beautiful answer of prayer and thanksgiving (2 Samuel vii. 18-29) reveals the really great piety of the man. It may and often has been for a moment overcast, for he was but a man, but here we see in what he differed from the men of his generation—why he was, with all his

faults, an accepted man, and why his name has come down as a pattern to all generations. He here proclaims his faith in God; that He is good; the *only* God. David could not always keep that high standpoint. Like one in later years, as great as he, he would have been willing to say, 'The good I would, that I do not: and the evil I would not, that I do.' Yet his trust was the same as that of St. Paul; he could say, 'Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me' (2 Cor. xii. 9).

David now enters on a career of conquest. In a short chapter (2 Samuel viii.) many successful campaigns are tersely told. The first to feel the weight of the new power are the Philistines. Either Achish, David's friend, is dead, or else David considers that these several attacks on him when they came to the plains of Rephaim had released him from the debt of gratitude; we know not which, but Gath and her villages are conquered. The Authorised Version leaves the words 'Metheg-Ammah' untranslated. We see, however, from 1 Chron. xviii. 1, that it was Gath which is indicated by the term, 'The bridle of the mother city.'

Hitherto the Philistines had been the invaders; now the tables are turned. Successful on the western frontier, the warrior king turns his attention to Moab. The record is brief: 'he smote Moab.' The unslain men are made to lie on the ground: two parts are slain, one part kept alive. The Mosaic laws were strict. If a city refused to surrender, all the males were to be slain, and the women and children to be slaves. Seen in this light, David was really merciful. What led to this war we are not told, for hitherto David and the King of Moab had been friends, so much so, that Jesse and his household found refuge

there when Saul harassed David. Jewish tradition says that Jesse had been murdered. Moab seems to have been a peaceful neighbour.

The kingdom of Zobah is next smitten. This was in the north; its limits are unknown, but appear to have extended to the Euphrates. In the Assyrian inscription, Zobah is indicated as coming between Hamath and Damascus. It must, however, have been in the great plains, and a remnant of the great Hittite Empire, for chariots and horsemen formed the force. David now for the first time in Israelite history forms a small chariot corps. The power at Damascus arriving too late to succour, their allies are beaten; David's movements had been too well-timed; his enemies' forces failed to concentrate, and so were beaten in detail, showing that David was a good strategist. Every foe north now falls before him. As he is returning, he defeats a raid in the 'Valley of Salt.' 1 Chron. xviii. 12 shows us that it was one of his generals who defeated the 'Edomites,' and not the 'Syrians,' as in this chapter. These dwellers in the rocks probably thought it a good opportunity to make a raid when David was engaged in the far north. What made David's force so victorious was that he had begun, as all great commanders since, by having a *corps d'élite*. His 'six hundred' were called Gibborim—'mighty men.' Amongst them were some strangers. Like the Greeks with their phalanx, the Romans with their legion, this force was really the 'ironsides' round which the militia formed. These last had no special training. Besides, these there was a body-guard for the king, chiefly foreigners—Cherethites, Pelethites—picked men; like the Janissaries or Mamelukes, who in after years rarely failed to turn the tide of battle. It has ever since been the

custom for Eastern kings to surround themselves with troops who, because they were aliens, would not be so liable to be affected by national politics, but attached to the ruler by personal motives.

The above remarks will enable us to see that David's forces were organised by a master of the art of war. David stands forth, too, as a righteous king, and an upright judge; he purges the civil and religious offices, and welds the disunited people into one State; he appoints responsible ministers, and rules, not as a despot, but as a constitutional monarch; for he has a 'recorder,' one who has to give him reports on all the daily events; he has a scribe, a 'writer,' one who has to see to all the rates and taxes, the tributes from subject nations. We, living in these days of grace, may be able to see faults in this great man; but think of the times in which he lived, and how different he was from all the kings of his times. In the Bible his life is so truly depicted that it is like an Eastern photograph: its stern truthfulness shows up the virtues of the man; though at the same time that same sunlight blackens his sins, and shows them as they are—ugly. For instance, it seem rather late in the day that now he should remember Jonathan. An old steward of Saul's is sent for, and he it is who tells David of the crippled son of his friend. The unambitious character of the father has descended to the son: he frankly, meekly accepts his position. In truest Eastern imagery he compares himself to the lowest of the low, the wild, despised dog. Saul's servant is ordered to see to the property of his master, while the cripple is made a guest at David's table.

David at this time is recalling past kindnesses done to him. He remembers that Nahash helped him, and therefore, on hearing of his death, sends an embassy to

condole with the son of his old friend. But the young Ammonite king, unthinking, careless, ignorant of all the sacred right due to an embassy, puffed up with his newly acquired power, inflicts a gross insult on those who had been sent by David,—a ‘light heart’ and brainless head brought on the ruin of a nation. Then, when he, Hanun, saw that David was enraged, it would have been wiser to see if it were not possible, by admitting his folly and offering reparation, to escape war. Doubtless, however, he was filled with pride; and as he looked at his vast city, noted her position, seemingly impregnable, he felt like the great king of Babylon—‘puffed up.’ At the same time he saw that it was going to be a death grapple; so he sought allies; he ‘hires’ them. Lust of war and love of gain have often made kings indifferent to the rights or wrongs of the quarrel, and equally indifferent to the lives of their people and soldiers. So now from Beth-rehob, a district beyond Dan in the north; the nations also beyond Damascus, from Zobah, which stretched to the Euphrates; the petty kings of the highlands north-east of Palestine, Maacah, and Ish-tob, probably remnants of that vast Hittite Empire, at one time the most powerful in the East—all these send their contingents; while David, hearing of this huge array, sends all the levy of Israel and the corps of mighty men.

His forces would have a long and difficult march after crossing the Jordan fords. They probably marched up Wâdy Sh’aîb; the high and broken ground of ‘Arâk el Emîr, 1400 feet above sea-level, would prevent a direct march. His army would leave Ramoth-Gilead, 2900 feet, on his left flank. Some of his forces may have gone up the valley of the Jabbok, having crossed by the ford at Bethshean and then turned; but the main army would,

we think, cross the more direct fords. Ammon drew out their own army close to the walls, while their allies sought to prevent a blockade. Joab saw that the first danger was to prevent the coming army joining hands with the foe; he therefore divides his forces, taking the picked corps to attack the Syrians. He makes a short and soldier-like address to the troops: 'Play the men,' says he; and past victories inspired the hearts of all his force.

The host of mercenaries is defeated. The Ammonites themselves prefer to trust to their walls; and as we look at the ruins now we feel they were justified in thinking themselves secure. Winter coming on, Joab withdrew his army. The commissariat arrangements of Eastern armies did not allow of their keeping the field for a prolonged campaign; and moreover Joab hesitated to attack so strong a position. We are not told, but probably Joab had suffered both from the march and from the battle with the Syrians, and wished to recruit his army.

These foreign allies will not, however, sit down under one defeat. They gather another army, and this time chariots and horsemen are the main forces opposed to David, who this time directs his army in person. Where Helam was is unknown, but it must have been on level ground, for the enemy's forces were drawn from beyond the river,' *i.e.* the Euphrates. All attempts to relieve Ammon failed, for their allies suffer a crushing defeat, and Ammon is left to its fate.

A new campaign, however, opens with another year. Joab is sent, the fortune of war declares in his favour, and Ammon having no forces in the field, a blockade ensues. David, unskilled in this sort of warfare, elects to stay in Jerusalem—fatal resolution! better far had

he shared the hard work of his soldiers, for, lapped in luxury, nothing to occupy his mind, he allows his eyes to dwell on the personal charms of a woman, who was wife to one of his famous captains. He had no excuse; he had never met the woman; it was purely lust, and not the charm of her mind or conversation that led him wrong. He fell because he, a most active, emotional character, was idle; and long before this his moral principles had been lax. As king, he should have been the one to set a royal example of a pure and manly life. His people and soldiers grudged him nothing; they risked their lives willingly for him; and, in return, at least he ought to have set an example of hard work, of self-restraint, of high principle. While men were slaving for his luxuries, and dying for his glory, he should at least have been as moral as the mass of his people. He violated the marriage vow, which none of his chiefs had done; and he, the head of the nation, was bound to set an example of obedience to law; moreover, by every tie of gratitude and honour he should have protected the wives and children of those brave men who, across the frontier, were risking their lives for him. It was not a common sin; he could not plead, 'The woman tempted me;' he had been playing too long on the very edge of sin; he had allowed bad habits to grow unchecked; he had left hold on God, and so had become a mere Eastern despot.

Poor king! so fallen from his high estate that he descends to meanness, and seeks to hide his sin by a trick on the brave Uriah, who has been sent for on the excuse that the king wished to hear from so valiant a soldier how the siege of Rabbah was progressing. When David's foul plot fails, through the Spartan simplicity of Uriah's conduct, a deeper scheme is laid. A

sham attack upon Rabbah is ordered, and, as foreseen, Uriah is slain. The position of that attack can almost be identified, for Rabbah Ammon is one of those sites which has never been lost. It is situated on a lofty plateau, triangular in shape; two sides are formed by steep wadies, and the massive walls of the old Ammonite city rise from precipitous cliffs. Laurence Oliphant in his book *East of Jordan* says: 'As I leant over and looked sheer down 300 feet in one wâdy, and 400 feet in another, I did not wonder at its having occurred to King David that the leader of a forlorn hope against these ramparts would meet with certain death, and consequently, assigning the position to Uriah. The only possible point from which that officer could have advanced was at the apex, where the low neck connects the citadel with the high plateau beyond; but here he would have had to charge up an almost inaccessible escarpment. This is confirmed by the account of Joab's message to David describing the incident: "We were upon them even unto the entering of the gate. And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants, and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also" (2 Sam. xi. 23, 24). Portions of this colossal gateway and the massive wall flanking it, at the point where the low neck joins the apex of the triangle, still remain to attest the truth of this narrative, and to identify the spot where Uriah met his fate.'

David sinned grossly; but when the prophet relates to him a story of wrong-doing, the man's sense of right immediately revolts against himself—he humbles himself. He is pardoned, but the consequences of his sin must follow, and judgment is passed. Never more can he be the same clear-souled man as in those happy days of old.

Joab presses on the siege of Rabbah. He takes the lower city which he calls 'the city of waters,' indicating very probably that the Jabbok was dammed into a lake near the lower city, to which the conformation of the valley would lend itself. But the citadel still remained, and was upon the point of being taken, because its water-supply was cut off, and the provisions, after a siege which must have lasted nearly two years, had become exhausted. David now joined his army in order to take part in the final successful attack. Fearful tortures are inflicted on the survivors. The 'brick kiln' was probably the 'burning place of Moloch,' where sacrifices were offered, and where the children of Ammon made their sons pass through the fire. Joab's message to David that 'he had taken the city of waters,' and then the statement that he asks David to come to take the city is seen to be no contradiction. The lower city was taken, the upper and the citadel were on the point of falling, and Joab suggests that it would reflect on the king if he were not present. Joab had quite understood that David had often wished to get rid of him, but now his king is in his power, and yet he diplomatically professes to wish honour to rest upon him. He must have known that the people would look with horror on David's sin, and he suggests that in the excitement and glory of the triumph over Ammon his people may forget the scandal. Anyhow, Joab was loyal to David.

The king has set an awful example, and one of his sons, Amnon, treads fast in his steps. David, however, cannot now punish the guilty; all he can do is to be angry! But Absalom cherishes revenge against Amnon—he bides his time; and finally he outrages all the sacred laws of hospitality by the murder of his brother who was also his guest.

No wonder again that David is sore distressed; the judgments for his own sin are fast being poured on his head; and for three years he is deprived of his favourite son. The place where the murder took place was Baal-hazor—it may be that Tell 'Asûr, twenty miles south of Ebal, is the site. A barren mountain of grey limestone, over 3300 feet high, it guards the entrance pass into Judea.

Absalom had fled to his grandfather, who held a small principality east of Argob, across Jordan, a wild and rugged country now called the Lejjah, where the Beni-Sukhr or 'Children of the Rock,' a wild race of Bedawin, the terror of all, now fitly represents the tribe from which the mother of Absalom sprang. Of quite recent years the Sultan has sought to restrain these Bedawin by granting tracts of land to Circassian colonists, as well as to Bulgarians from Widdin; a few years ago more than 3000 of these colonists were planted on this frontier. Left much to themselves, they will doubtless prosper. The country is a natural impregnable fortress, about twenty miles in length by fifteen in breadth. When Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt held Syria in 1835, he thought to bring the Lejjah into subjection. After losing 25,000 men he was compelled to withdraw, vanquished. Such was the country to which Absalom fled.

David does not punish his son on his return; the sword of justice had lost its edge in the king's hands. Through a cleverly devised story told by a woman who is instigated by Joab, David allows his sinning son to come out of exile. Whatever faults Joab had, he was ever loyal to his old leader; harsh and unfeeling as he seems to all others, reckless as to life, yet he cannot bear to see his king unhappy. Most of Joab's sins came from his love to David. Absalom returns to Jerusalem, all the people are proud

of him, but his father will not see him for two long years. David postpones the question, tries half-measures, allows his son to inhabit his own house and see his friends, while he himself refuses to see or receive him. It was a policy without backbone. As Joab had been sent to Geshur to bring Absalom back, so now Absalom wishes to send him as messenger to the king. The proud spirit of the son chafes at the position he is placed in, and when Joab declines to come, he orders the general's fields to be set on fire—a haughty mode of obtaining a hearing. What he says to Joab is, however, logically strong. Why was I sent for? I was happy enough in Geshur. Get me an audience of 'the king'—he does not say 'my father'—let him punish me if I deserve it! Father and son meet, the kiss of peace follows, and then boldly does Absalom proclaim to the world his intention to be treated as royal.

A rich person might have his two runners or syces before his chariot, but Absalom will have fifty. He rightly understands that what all Eastern people—and Western too for that matter—like is show, and David of late had been affording little enough of that. He had never forgiven himself, the spectre of the brave Uriah haunted him, and his absence from public gaze only gave a better chance to his intriguing son; for to win the masses Absalom now shows himself in another capacity. He sits at the gate; he suavely talks to all who come up for judgment; he inquires into the merits or demerits of the cases, and then artfully regrets his powerlessness; he hesitates not to sow sedition; he day by day whispers privately that he considers the people are wronged; he deplores the want of upright judges; and day by day sitting in the gate, the simple folk learn to look on him as a

judge to be desired, for to sit in the gate was the function of the judges. So unchanging is that Eastern land, that not many years ago the writer has seen 'sitting in the gate' at Jaffa, the Cadi or Judge, with his secretary and advisers, hearing cases. On the river-bank at Derr, the capital of Nubir, the court of justice was under a majestic old sycamore-tree, where a semicircular row of benches was arranged, and where the assize was held.

When suitors approach to do obeisance to Absalom, as prince and judge, he protests he cannot accept such honour; he takes his friend by the hand and kisses him on the neck; he royally unbends, and the simple folk, so unaccustomed to such familiarity, see not the deep motives which govern all Absalom's actions, and are won. His fine person, his superior birth, his condescending sympathy with all, is the common talk in tent or town—that he, the Crown Prince, whose princely retinue was the admiration of all, should yet have time to attend to all the grievances of the nation, led the masses to wish for him as king, and so the prop of popular love is lost to David. The text now says 'forty years' as the period during which this duplicity went on; the Syriac and Arabic versions say 'four,' and the rendering of these last is undoubtedly the true one. Under the pretence of wishing to fulfil a vow, Absalom asks permission to visit Hebron. The lion David may be old, but Absalom and his fellow-conspirators fear his claws. Their going to Hebron would imply that the tribe of Judah was dissatisfied. A proud tribe, they had seen the seat of government removed from their midst, and like all provincials they looked upon the citizens of the great city with feelings of enmity. David had long been absent from his first home; the generation then existing there had not the same feelings of love and

devotion that had marked those six hundred who had borne with David the toils and troubles of his early life. Tribal jealousy doubtless had been seething in their midst. The tribes never cordially worked together, and the 'home rule' of each tribe was a constant source of friction and danger to the commonwealth,—a danger which in the days soon to come brought bitter fruit. So at Hebron, and out of the clutches of the body-guard of David's stout-hearted friends, Absalom soon throws off the mask.

Hebron, one of the oldest cities in the world, is now one of the most fanatical of all Moslem towns; its unique attraction is the great Mosque, underneath which lies the dust of the Patriarchs. The stones of the building are massive, some being 30 and 40 feet long by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 broad. This mosque covers the 'Cave of Machpelah' (*i.e.* 'division in half'), and the Moslem guardians of the sanctuary assert that the cave is double. That cave has probably never been entered for seven hundred years. Few but royal persons have of late years entered even the Mosque. It is death for a Christian to attempt so to do; but the world does move even in the kingdom of the Sultan, for owing to his curiosity to know what the interior of the Mosque was really like, a photographer was ordered to take some views for the Sultan's inspection. One of those photographs came into the hands of the 'Palestine Exploration Fund,' and the committee allowed the *Illustrated London News* to publish to the whole world a representation of the sacred shrines.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DAVID'S FLIGHT

#### 2 SAMUEL xv.-xviii.

Absalom's Rebellion—The Flight of David—Defeat and Death of Absalom.

SETTING up the standard of revolt at Hebron would give Absalom an important strategical position without a fight. People flocked to his standard. Ahithophel, David's most trusty counsellor, his prime minister, so to speak, falls away—he had private reasons for hating the king, which David seems quite to have forgotten; for David had been the murderer of his grandson by marriage (Uriah), and the corrupter of his granddaughter.

Rarely in history do we find an insurrection so successful. David gives up without a blow the strong citadel on Zion, the palace, and city; and with but a body-guard of those old warriors who had undergone with him all the desert perils, he passes up the Mount of Olives. Barefoot, weeping, and with dust-covered heads this mournful cavalcade sets out. How different from the times when, flushed with conquest, laden with spoils, they had returned from their desert raids! Three paths lead, and have always led, over Mount Olivet, two tending eastwards passing Bethany, and regaining the Jericho road; while the road in the middle of the range of hills, and that which leads directly to the summit, is the one now



JERUSALEM FROM THE NORTH.

usually ascended by tourists. It leads to the little village and mosque, and then away to the wilderness and the plains of Jericho. Directly after leaving the top of the mount, the road passes through purely desert country—a country of ravines, of grassless slopes, a stony, barren tract. It would be safer for David than the Jericho road, for on that road pursuit would have been easy. There too are those six hundred men who had followed David's fortunes from Gath. The leader, Ittai, displays his steadfast loyalty to the fallen king. This brave man—a Philistine, it is true, and one so well known that six hundred of his fellow-countrymen had elected to follow him when he attached himself to David—is unflinching in his loyalty, and wherever the king may go he will follow, be it life or death. A grand resolve, and how it contrasts with the weakness of the people of the land! 'All the country wept with a loud voice.' If any of the brave warriors wept, it was not from fear, but from feelings of bitter humiliation; fear was unknown to those brave hearts.

David will not permit that the sacred Ark should accompany him. He will undergo whatever Fate may have in store for him; his people may be disloyal and fall away, but he will not deprive the nation of the Sacred Emblem of their faith. With the better feelings of olden days, he now in his distress turns to the God of his youth and says, If the Lord will, He will bring me back, if not, lo! here am I; 'let Him do as seemeth good unto Him.' Yes, when he acknowledged his weakness, gave up all pride and self-will, he was himself again. The God Who had led him all his life was truly a merciful God, One Who willeth not the death of a sinner; and therefore, now, David in his humiliation and distress is really on firmer ground than

David on that throne, haughty, sinning, and devising evil plots against the innocent.

One privy counsellor has joined the insurgents, another remains loyal. Hushai, truly called 'a friend,' or as 1 Chron. xxvii. 33 puts it 'companion,' to David, wishes to attach himself to the king; he, however, would seem to have been an older man than any of the others, a man for the study, not a warrior able to endure hardship; for David says, if you come you will be 'a burden unto me.' No, your place is the city; there join yourself to Absalom; you will be told all his plans, and through the young men Ahimaaz and Jonathan you will be able to acquaint me. Craft against craft, the young usurper would be no match for the older man.

On the hill-slope, just where the desert road begins on its eastern side, a welcome present is brought to the fugitive king. There is an evil intention in the gift, for Ziba, the giver, slanders his master, Mephibosheth, and obtains what he had hoped for, a promise from David that he, the steward, should be the possessor of the poor cripple's inheritance. We see how David was ever suspicious that some of Saul's family would seek to recover possession of the throne. Another of the house of Saul, more frank, tells out his heart, soundly rating and cursing David, all the while displaying the usual Eastern signs of contempt. The spot where this incident took place, Bahurim, was clearly some house by the road-side. On that eastward track-way limestone cliffs exist quite close to the road shortly after passing the summit of the mount. The warriors of David's escort, unaccustomed to insult, would soon have ended Shimei's taunts; the king, however, says, If *my son* seeks my life, surely I can bear the taunts of this 'Benjamite'! In his deep

sorrow David cannot resist a sneer against the tribe of Benjamin.

And now in that dreary wilderness the people have time to feel how weary they are, and the gift of Ziba is found most acceptable. Here in the desert they feast; there in the palace just over the hill Absalom is greeting Hushai; note the sneer with which he speaks—the utter want of respect to his king and father. ‘Why wentest thou not with thy *friend*?’ The wily old statesman has an evasive answer ready; he befools the upstart; a sort of cabinet council is held, and then the long pent-up hatred of Ahithophel finds its vent. Scorn for scorn, foul outrage for foul outrage—he suggests a crime to the son, which, had there been one single spark of manhood in him, he would have revolted from instantly. The crime was one which would make the son for ever abhorred by his father; would show the mob that he claimed to be king, that he treated his father as if dead, and that therefore he as present king had, by right of conquest, power over the concubines of David, whose anger, were he alive, was a thing to be despised. It would show all the conspirators that he had utterly cast off all restraint; that he had indeed taken the boldest step, and that never more could his father forgive him. Ahithophel furthermore gives wise advice, and offers himself to be the one to carry it out. This very moment give me, says he, twelve thousand men, and I will pursue him; he is suffering from the stunning blow of your revolt; I will slay him and bring back the people to you. It was the very best advice possible for a wicked man to offer; he had not gained his fame as a wise counsellor for naught. Not a word of objection from the son! not a word of remonstrance from the elders! and yet they understood that the murder of

David was what was proposed! There was, however, a power watching over David who could turn all this wicked wisdom to naught. Hushai is now consulted. How wise his answer; his specious arguments seem to be unanswerable; and yet we know it was but the flattery he offered Absalom which led the wicked son to follow his advice. It pleased his wicked pride to think that from Dan to Beersheba all would elect to follow him. The fickle elders echoing the words of Absalom, recall their first thoughts, and soon the news is brought to David that he has not to fear any sudden pursuit.

The messengers appointed to carry the tidings to David had all this time been in hiding at the well En-rogel, now called the 'Virgin's well,' and by the natives, 'the mother of steps.' Here is a subterranean aqueduct, and near it quite recently a channel was discovered in which were caves where some cooking dishes, lamps, and charcoal were found. These hiding-places had probably been frequently used since the days of David; but we can see how these young men could then secrete themselves, and the go-between was a woman—nothing more natural than that a woman should go day by day, and frequently too, for water. She now goes with the all-important news, and the men who have been in hiding hasten away. Not, however, unseen: the sharp eyes of a boy saw them—recognised them—knew that they were followers of David, and big with importance goes and tells Absalom. He at once felt there was some danger that he knew not, and orders instant pursuit. The spies had noticed the lad, they halt at Bahurim to throw any possible followers off the scent, for this is the place where Shimei lives, and he is known to hate David. It may be that Bahurim is Almit, three and a half miles north-east of Jerusalem;

and here some very remarkable rock-cut cisterns are found, also a deep well. Again to a woman's wit the messengers are indebted for safety: the pursuing band had been close at their heels; she suggests the men going down the well, she then covers the mouth, and finally spreading corn over that covering, hides the opening from the soldiers. That the search was strict and severe is implied—the fugitives had been seen—their persons are well known, and the woman gives an answer which conceals the truth—and the sort of answer or quibble which all Easterns delight in: 'They are gone over the brook of water,' says she. The soldiers are tricked, and return to Jerusalem, while the messengers are hurrying away to David. There is no rest in the camp that night, danger is too pressing. Over the Jordan fords the band passes, and when the dawn breaks there is not one left on the western bank.

Cool, calm-headed Ahithophel no sooner knew that his advice had been rejected than he foresaw the failure of his revenge; he foresaw too the failure of the revolution; he knew that the excitement of momentary success would not avail against the determined bravery of Joab and his band of veterans; and he well understood what a grand recruiting ground Gilead was for David; and though the mob might shout for Absalom, yet the rash valour of undrilled masses would be but chaff before the 'mighty men.' And so this cool, crafty man, keeping up his character to the last, went back to his own house, arranged all his affairs, and then hanged himself.

Meanwhile the king has pressed on, gathering strength as he went into Gilead. Inhabited by a race of mountaineers, this country, a territory of forests and hills, far from courts, had heard little of scandal. That the king could not do wrong was an article of faith to those dwellers

on the breezy uplands. What they knew of David was his prowess. Living as they did on the borders of Ammon, they could recall the valour of the mighty men, and they especially had been enriched by the conquests of David.

From Lo-debar—‘the driving out of flocks’—from a son of Nahash, from Barzillai, came most welcome supplies of food, of which David’s force stood greatly in need. He was really falling back on a good base of supplies, while Absalom’s forces would be suffering from want, and in a hostile country.

Let us pause for a moment to glance at the country in which the hostile forces are gathered. ‘The traveller who only knows Palestine to the west of the Jordan can form no idea of the luxuriance of the hill-sides of Gilead. Here we crossed sparkling rivulets, where the sunlight glinted through the foliage of handsome oak, terebinth, and carob trees, and traversed glades seldom disturbed by the foot of man, which led into the deep solitudes of the forest. In one of these Absalom met his end; and one could well understand, as one came suddenly upon the brink of some rock or gorge, why, possibly in headlong and disastrous flight, so many of the combatants on that fatal day should have been numbered among the missing, that it was said “the wood devoured more than the sword.” In places the forest opened, and the scenery resembled that of an English park, the large trees standing singly in the long grass; while at others, where possibly in old days there had been well-cultivated farms, the trees gave way altogether to luxuriant herbage, encircling it as though it were a lake of grass into which their long branches drooped.’<sup>1</sup>

The old warrior makes an able disposition of his forces.

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Oliphant—*East of Jordan*.

The reserve is under Ittai. David proposes to lead his troops, but the love of the people, the fear that he might come to some harm, causes them to protest; moreover they tell him that he ought to remain at headquarters and so be able to direct reinforcements to whichever point may be in danger. A parting charge the king has to give—Absalom is to be spared whatever happens; it shows the father's love for his guilty son.

The host takes the field, leaving Mahanaim, which is thought to be represented by the ruins of Birket Mahneh. Traces exist of a buried city of considerable area, and situated on the lower spurs of the mountains, close to Bashan, which here runs up to the borders of Gilead. The forest in which this important engagement took place is called the "wood of Ephraim;" but it is evident that though called by the name of another tribe it was in the land of Gilead, and must have been in close proximity to Mahanaim. Probably a settlement of Ephraimites, after whom a wood was called, was situated on the extreme southern forests of Gad, and thus specially known as the wood of Ephraim. That this site is the most probable one may be seen from another name. David in the forty-second Psalm, which was probably composed while bewailing the death of his son in the gates of Mahanaim, uses the word 'Mizar.' Close to the ruins before spoken of is a village called el-Mesâr—the names are identical. The country near Mesâr is composed of high-rolling downs, and close up to the wooded slopes of the Gilead mountains active warriors, like those men of Gad (who are described as 'men of might and men of war, fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains' (1 Chron. xii. 8), and of whom it is further

said 'one at least could resist a hundred and the greatest a thousand'), soon made havoc amongst the motley, ill-drilled forces of Absalom, entangled as the latter were in the dense woods—dense even now.

Absalom is soon in full flight; his mule rushes under the spreading branches of a forest oak, one of the low forks of which catches the runaway by the neck, while the frightened animal passes on, and the usurper is left suspended. The soldiers pass on, not daring to slay the king's son; but one runs back and tells Joab, who speedily puts an end to Absalom, throwing the body into an old disused cistern, and filling up the pit with stones, raising in fact a heap of stones over the body as a punishment. This custom still exists, for well we remember while travelling in the desert seeing the whole of our escort cast stones on a heap which lay by our track; every sign of contempt, spitting, cursing, etc., was indulged in, and the reason given was that the body of a wicked chief lay there—one who had perished in a foray. Such was the treatment that Joab meted out to Absalom. Joab knew there never would be peace if this unruly prince were to live, and so this great heap in the dark forest was his monument, instead of that pillar in the king's dale which the ambitious prince had reared. This pillar cannot be the one still existing in the valley of Jehoshaphat close to Jerusalem, for the existing building is not Jewish, but a compound architecture; though it is called 'Absalom's Pillar,' its date is probably not older than the time of Herod. By its side is a huge heap of small stones, and never does a Jew pass without casting a stone on this heap, while he curses the name of the ungrateful son.

Sitting between the two gates of the city the old king is anxiously expecting news; no roar of artillery sounds

on his ear to tell him how the fight goes on. He sends a soldier to the look-out tower, who sees a man running towards the city. He cries out, and the king rightly surmises that as it is but one man, therefore he is a messenger; but behind that man comes another, and so it is seen that the news is important. The first runner is recognised: he is one of those young men who were hidden at the spring. David is hopeful that as he brought good news before, so also now. Gasping out 'All is well,' the tired runner falls to the earth, adding that victory is complete. He knows the affection of David for his guilty son, and dares not to tell the news. The other runner, one of Joab's own black slaves, a syce probably, so chosen because of his swiftness, now rushes up. He, an alien, has no thought but of the overthrow of the enemy, and when questioned tells the truth. He may not use the ugly word death, but his message is clear enough. Leaving the congregation of elders, the poor old father seeks the solitude of a little chamber over the gate, while upon the air rings out the bitter cry of a father's heart: 'O my son, my son! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' The father's heart rose over the wrong done to the king, and saw nothing but picture of the handsome winning boy, the one who had sat a cherished idol on the knee of his father in those happy days of long ago, before ambition and crime had stained his career. The victorious general on his return is greeted with cries of woe instead of the hymns of triumph. The warriors creep back silently as if ashamed, and amidst the stillness and hush of the city the wail of the broken-hearted father still rings out: 'O Absalom, my son, my son!'

The danger is not yet over, and Joab knows it. The

Israelites were an emotional people, subject to rapid changes of feeling; and though David has gained the victory, yet if the soldiers feel that he valued his son's life more than theirs, it is quite possible that they will forsake him. It showed great courage on the part of Joab to bluntly tell the truth on this point to David. David knew that Joab was a man of his word, and that he would know what were the feelings of those tried old warriors who now saw themselves neglected and blamed. The rebuke was just, and it told: the king came down, and sat in the gate while the soldiers defiled before him. Of course 'the people' mentioned in the text only means the followers of David, for the insurgent tribes had fled.

And now that the insurgent cause has failed, trimmers go about and remember and quote the doings of the king in past years; they had conveniently forgotten them when Absalom was parading his retinue and speaking his glib words in the gate. Now that they have lost the king, who is in Gilead, and out of their power, and moreover victorious, these loud-mouthed traitors wish him back. David appears to have felt himself in a difficult position: he had cut himself off from his own tribe, and though successful in this battle across Jordan, it had been principally by the help of the men of Gilead, so he did not dare to go back unless by special request of the men of Judah. He had a desire to return, but he acted in a way as a constitutional king—he left his returning or not subject to an invitation. If invited he would go, if not he would not bring on civil war by going. Accordingly he sends, not warriors, but two priests, to reason with the elders of the tribes of Judah. Moreover, wishing to conciliate all parties, he promises to make Amasa, who had been commander-in-chief to the rebel force, his own chief captain. This

shows how he resented the act of Joab in slaying Absalom. To be approached in this meek fashion by the victorious king carried away the hearts of all. Accordingly they send back the wished-for invitation, 'Return thou.' It is a curious message, for they add, 'and all thy servants.' It was a reassertion of tribal rights. You may be king, say these elders, but you cannot override our local rights. It may have been a matter of form, like shutting Temple Bar in the face of royalty; all the same they stood upon their rights. All ended well, the king came back over Jordan, Judah coming only as far as Gilgal, that old centre, to meet and receive their king back again. Details are given as to the procession. Shimei, of the tribe of Benjamin, the man who had so cursed David, heads the procession; a ferry-boat brings over the king's household. Until quite recently a ferry-boat was the only means of crossing the Jordan for ladies and children. Its chief work in recent years was to take over Russian pilgrims; they would cross the river merely to say that they had stood on the eastern banks of Jordan, and then recross; now, however, a wooden bridge has been erected, which is guarded by a few Turkish soldiers.

## CHAPTER XIV

### DAVID'S RETURN AND DEATH

2 SAMUEL xix-xxiv. 1 KINGS i. ii.

David's Return—The Closing Years of his Reign—The Census—Solomon—  
Death of David.

EVENTS proved that it was not wise on David's part to have made such a marked appeal to the tribe of Judah, for immediately the other tribes began to accuse that tribe of double-dealing; the tribes charged them with self-seeking, and declared that their zeal was caused by unfair motives. The hot-headedness of Judah at once asserted itself; fierce words passed, and very soon the little spark was struck which kindled all the kingdom again into open flame. Certainly this nation was not formed of picked specimens of humanity, but of its roughest and coarsest grains.

We have before noted that the books of Samuel are not arranged in chronological order, and if we now turn to 2 Sam. xxi. we shall there find related events which had probably occurred some time previously, and about the same time as David's sin with Bathsheba. This conduct had alienated the devout, the law-abiding portion of the people, and David knew it; he and his advisers seem to have dreaded a revolt, and their minds turned to the family of Saul as the quarter from which danger would

come. We have seen that they were mistaken : the real leader to fear was from David's own household, his own favourite son. Blind to the real enemy, it seems as if the king and his advisers had fomented this plot to get rid of the supposed danger, and so we have the grim story of the execution of the seven sons of the late king. The execution was carried out, and in defiance of the law, which said that the bodies of criminals should be buried soon after death, their poor bodies were left 'from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven.' The time the bodies remained exposed is not given, but as they were hanged in 'the beginning of barley harvest' some considerable time no doubt elapsed. The pitiful story of the poor mother watching and scaring away the vultures and the wild beasts would be told over all the land, and as the tribe to which the dead men had belonged was that of Benjamin, we need not go far to seek for the causes of the dissatisfaction on the part of that tribe.

All these evil and despotic deeds had influenced the nation, and so we see that immediately after the revolt of Absalom, another leader, Sheba, a man of Benjamin, arose. At once all the ten tribes rallied to his standard, and David was left alone with Judah as his sole support. Amasa, who had held possession of Jerusalem, did not, however, follow. The bribe of commander-in-chief to David had attached him to the king, and to him the king gives the order that the whole of the one tribe is to be assembled in three days. It was hard upon Joab, after all the proofs of devotion he had given, to be displaced by one who had held high the standard of revolt; it does seem as if his words, 'Thou lovest thine enemies and hatest thy friends,' were true. But the king's move was a false one, since

Amasa either had not the zeal or the ability to get the tribe to assemble, or else they refused to follow a leader in whom they had no respect or confidence. It may be, too, that they were offended at seeing Joab removed from a post which he had held with distinction for twenty-seven years. The result was that David took fright at the delay, for he feared danger in a long contest. Absalom in *his* revolt had unwisely taken the field, and therefore was soon crushed. If this new leader threw himself into any fortified city the contest would be long, and in the unsettled conditions of men's minds that would be an element of great danger—therefore he appoints Abishai as a fresh chief. Abishai was not one to delay; he was devoted to David, and his impulsive character, his great courage and skill, as shown in many past combats, made him a fit commander if Joab was to be passed over. It says a good deal for Joab's devotion that he overlooked his dismissal, and that he cheerfully took a subordinate post. It seems that, though dismissed as chief, yet David did not dare to take from him the command of the veteran band.

Under the new leader there would be little delay, and the soldiers soon reach the great stone at Gibeon, a place of ill-omen, for there, at the pool hard by, it was that 'play' first began the internecine wars (see p. 186). Here the sluggard Amasa was met; he may have not heard that he was deposed as commander, and expected to lead the band of mighty men. Joab's suppressed rage broke out; with an utter want of fair dealing he pretends friendship; and, though mad with jealousy, he hurries to meet Amasa. As if by accident, Joab's sword fell out, he picks it up with the left hand, and still hurries on; the whole occurrence seems so natural that Amasa takes no heed; and then with the right hand Joab takes hold of Amasa's beard as if to

push it aside in order to give the kiss on the neck—as usual still with Easterns as a pledge of peace—and then foully drove the sword with the left hand into Amasa's body. No need to strike a second blow; no pity in the heart of ruthless Joab, he presses on, leaving one of his band by the dying chief. Pointing to the body the soldier shouts out: 'He that is for Joab and for David let him go on.' The startled soldiers arrest their steps; they know not what to do, but the soldier in charge of the body is one after Joab's own heart. Seeing the men hesitate, he removes the poor body out of the roadway and covers it with a cloth, so that the troops coming up pass by in ignorance of the deed. No details are given, no events recorded of the long chase after Sheba; it was long and hot, for he had reached Abel, a city in the extreme north, an important place, with many inhabitants, called 'a mother in Israel.' It was close to Lebanon; its site is probably represented by the village 'Abel' west of Bânais, a small place close to the frontier, while seven miles from this are ruins of a large city, on a rocky knoll, with the river Derdâra hard by. This place, so close to the Syrian frontier, would naturally be strongly fortified, and it was all-important that Sheba should not be allowed to use this as a focus of revolt, or that he should get the help of the Syrians. Joab hurries on the siege; he has by this time learnt something of the art of attacking fortified cities, and he means to storm it. He raises a bank that his men may rush it, some fill up the ditch, others essayed to undermine the walls; no respite is given. Joab is well known: if once the place is taken by storm, woe betide the inhabitants; in their distress a woman takes the lead. In savage races, or in desperate peril, the timid sex will often dare the boldest deeds and shame the boldest men, so now this woman of

Abel asks for speech of Joab. She pleads that she is one of those in Israel who wish to live in peace—no insurgent, no conspirator—she ably pleads for her native town. Joab's answer is short and to the point: he has no quarrel with the people of Abel, he seeks a man who has insulted his king, who has troubled him with revolt; if he is given up, all will be well. The woman closes with his offer, and the head of Sheba is promptly thrown over the wall. The death of one man ends the war; Joab keeps his word, and the host return to Jerusalem. No word of reproach from David as to the murder of Amasa, no word now of another chief, and Joab reassumes his old command over the whole army, his post over the veteran guard being given to Benaiah, a soldier who had done mighty deeds. And now again David appears to have appointed ministers to see to the various affairs of the kingdom.

The murky clouds of war, of deceit or murder, for a brief space clear away, and we hear the voice of the singer, coming like a breath of sweet refreshing air after the sultry thunderstorm. Whether these songs really were composed at this period, we cannot say; enough that they show us the working of David's inner self—that self so often clouded over by sin, by rashness, yet ever going back to its first love; he sings of the greatness and goodness of God. It was the Lord Who had rescued the fugitive in his sore distress; it was He Who had promoted the shepherd of sheep to be the ruler over nations. David sees that the rule of the Lord is a just rule, and that therefore he, who as regent rules over men, must be just too; he fully admits that it had not been so with himself. He, however, declares that such had been his wish; he prays that the poor seed may grow. When we read this, or turn to

his penitential Psalms, we are enabled to understand this many-sided man—a man so utterly in advance of his age that, save Jonathan, we never read of his having a *single* friend ; he was cast in a stormy time, he lived with a people who never knew what love or gratitude meant. They had had Moses, their deliverer and lawgiver, they rebelled against him and broke the laws. They had had Samuel, and they scorned his rule. They had David, who had raised the broken fragments into a powerful kingdom, and yet revolt after revolt was the answer to all his efforts. No wonder if this man often sinned, he had such a weight to bear. In piety, in knowledge, he towers head and shoulders above all his fellows. His devotion, his deep insight into the nature and being of his Maker, has left him a world-wide fame. His words of hope, of joy, of repentance, have sunk deep into the hearts of men ; the best men of every age have loved, copied, and found comfort in his words. Try to imagine yourself in his place with all the circumstances the same, then thankfully you will admit that it has been good for the world that he lived, good for the world that all his history has been so fully written out. Divine justice did not overlook or extenuate his sin, or say that kings must be excused, that they could not always be pious, that they could not be judged as other men. Oh, no ; the poor repentant sinner was pardoned, but as a *king* he had sinned, and as a king the punishment came, in that he never knew a thoroughly peaceful, happy time again.

The man blunders and sins again. Whether the events of the twenty-fourth chapter of the second book of Samuel occurred at this time we cannot say, but think that really they occurred earlier in the reign of David. It seems that the rise of the neighbouring kingdoms had made him dream

of new conquests : Assyria was but just waking into life ; Egypt was getting a new lease of power, and so a warlike census is ordered : David wishes to know how many men he can bring into the field ; forgetting that it is not numbers, but a righteous cause, which obtains the Divine guidance. Joab even, warrior as he is, protests. The masterful spirit of the king will not submit to reason, the orders are to be carried out. It would seem as if the king knew that this numbering was disliked by the nation, for the commander-in-chief and the captains of the host are ordered to do the work, all unwilling as they, too, were ; and then from one end of the kingdom to the other the officials are hard at work. In the sixth verse we read of 'Tahtim-hodshi,' translated in the margin, 'the newly inhabited,' now known, however, to have been the border of 'the Hittite' territory. The mission lasts nine months and twenty days, but the enumeration was not complete : the tribes of Levi and Benjamin were not counted ; no reason is stated for this, and the total without these two tribes is given as eight hundred thousand of the tribes, while of Judah the number is given as five hundred thousand men. We do not wonder at the haughtiness of the latter tribe, if their numbers were so out of proportion to the others, though the explanation may be that they of Judah submitted willingly to the census, while the others evaded it ; and we have seen that the office was repugnant to all the military commanders engaged. No sooner is the imperfect census handed in to the king than his heart smote him. In the stillness of the night he had been pondering over his dreams of conquest, and he had seen how contrary those dreams were to the purpose of the Lord. True, Moses had twice numbered the people, but with a motive very different from his ; he

sees his sin, and at once he seeks forgiveness; like Saul, he had 'done foolishly,' lust of power and conquest had this time led him astray. After a troubled night his worst fears are realised, in that the prophet Gad brings him a stern message from the Lord. Either years of famine—the text here says '*seven*,' but 1 Chron. xxi. 12 says 'three,' which seems to be the truer reading—three months' humiliation by enemies, or three days of pestilence! In the penitent frame of mind in which David now is, he wisely elects for that course which will leave all to God, and he, the king, will take the same risk as the meanest of his subjects.

A dire pestilence sweeps through the land; the destroying angel has reached Jerusalem when his hand is stayed. The point on which he stood was now to be sacred for evermore. On the lower Mount Moriah, which is dominated by Zion (the old Jebus), was a threshing-floor; threshing-floors were then, and still are, on the summit of the limestone hills, for chaff not being valued by Easterns, the exposed positions, open to every wind, are selected, causing the chaff to be blown away, the corn being usually stored in some cave or dry cistern hard by. This threshing-floor belonging to a Jebusite, Araunah, the late king of Jebus; and it was to be the site of the altar of burnt-offerings. Very many of the so-called 'sacred sites' in Palestine will not bear close examination, for many were selected by the monks in the Middle Ages for motives of gain. This site of the sacred rock will, however, bear the very strictest investigation, and as we look on it to-day we may be sure that here we look on one of the few sites which are truly known. This place of burnt-offering was afterwards covered by the Temples of Solomon, Ezra, and Herod; and when

the victorious Moslem, Omar, took Jerusalem from the Christians, his first care was to rediscover the sacred rock. He found it covered with filth; with his own hands he set to work to cleanse it, an example which was followed by all his captains. Then he caused to be erected the great mosque, now called the Mosque of Omar, or better known still as the 'Dome of the Rock.' The Kubbet es Sakhra there, in the middle of the mosque-floor, is the natural rock, the one object which this splendid building was erected to cover. The rock, almost untouched by chisel, remains in its unadorned sternness with a low railing to keep off intruders, a huge carpet suspended over it by ropes from the roof, that no dust may fall upon it. The mind is filled with awe, as one recalls the eventful memories attaching to that mass of stone. A small gutter is noticed on the rock, probably to take off the blood from the sacrifices; a few yards away are some steps, descending which you find yourself in a cave, and then you observe in the roof an opening which leads to the rock surface above. Probably this cave was the receptacle for corn in the old Jebusite days, the cistern for blood in after years, for under your feet you see that the floor is hollow; as probably a drain or shaft took the blood from thence to the valley of the Kedron. The Moslems admit that there is a shaft concealed by the slabs on the floor, and call it the 'Well of the lost spirits;' but no inducement will prevail on the guardians of the Mosque to allow that slab to be lifted, and so absolute *proof* that there is a drain is left for future explorers.

David is now very old, second childhood has set in, and from henceforth no noble deeds, no kindly, kingly acts are recorded of him; his physicians prescribe for his shivering fits a remedy which shocks all right feeling, and we hear

of no word of protest. He had multiplied wives, but not one is to be found about his dying bed; the one for whom he had so deeply sinned only enters his room to remind him of his promise of power for her son. His whole household teemed with intrigue; his palace was disgraced by plots, which are common to the harems of Eastern despots; rival sons of rival mothers disgrace themselves in the sight of all men by open rebellion. The dying man is tormented by another rebellion, and again by a son Adonijah, who is now the eldest. We see how unwise David had been in his family life and rule; this handsome son had never been checked, he had had his own way from a youth, petted and spoilt—like Absalom, he has no real love for his father, and, knowing that he is in extremity, makes no secret of his determination to be king; it can be said of him, however, that he does not try, as did Absalom, to conceal his ambition, and wonderful to say, he not only gains over Joab, but Abiathar the priest. Oriental usage gave the power to a king to elect whom he would as his successor, though according to the Hebrew laws of primogeniture Adonijah claimed the right to be king in place of his father. In the past history of the nation, Jacob had been preferred to Esau. David himself was not the eldest son of Jesse; and though he had no royal right to his kingdom, yet he had been Divinely chosen in place of Saul. So it was a double revolt, first against the rule of the Divine King, and then against David, who, was guided by the promise (2 Samuel vii. 12) that a son at that time unborn was to be the one to succeed him. Guided by that, he, it appears, had promised Bathsheba that her son should inherit, and Solomon was the only son who had been born when David was king over all Israel.

Adonijah made a great feast by the 'Stone Zoheleth,' by En-rogel, and it would seem that few of the leaders were absent from the gathering. The word Zoheleth means 'slippery.' On the east side of the Kedron valley, in full sight of Jerusalem, is a bold bluff or cliff by the side of a pathway to the adjacent village of Siloam. Ask the Arabs the name of that bluff (for they, like Scotch foresters in a deer forest, have a name for every rock), and the answer will come, 'Hajar Zahweileh,' the 'rock Zahweileh,' the exact equivalent of the old name; and truly it deserves its name 'slippery,' for one requires to be as sure-footed as the Arab to scale that pathway by the cliff.

While the feasting is going on, the alarm has been given, the king is not yet dead. His spirit flashes out again in the promptness with which he orders priest, prophet, and soldier to take the bodyguard, to take his own royal mule, to set the youth Solomon on the beast; the trumpets are to blow the royal fanfare, and the soldiers to shout 'God save King Solomon!' In the presence of all, the youth was anointed with the holy oil, and this rival proclamation would be in sight of the men feasting and shouting at Zoheleth, for Solomon was proclaimed king at Gihon. The word means 'the spring-head,' and it is now generally agreed that the spring on the west side of the Kedron valley, and at the foot of Ophel, is the place indicated. 'This curious fountain,' says Major Conder in *Bible Geography*, 'rises in a cave which, though partly natural, has been enlarged by excavating the rock at the back; the water flows irregularly, and rises very suddenly at times; it seems at first to have flowed out into the Kedron valley, but was diverted later through a rock-cut tunnel to Siloam. Hence the spring was also called En Rogel, which appears to mean

“fountain of the aqueduct.”’ That part of the ceremony of installation took place before the old king is clear. Benaiah, chief of the bodyguard, had remained faithful, and led his mighty band down the steep slope from Zion to Gihon; the shouting, the pipes blown by the multitude, disturbed the feast of conspirators. Joab knew by the blast of the trumpets that he and Adonijah were checkmated; in fearful panic each guest went his own way—the conspiracy collapsed. With the fate of the various members of that conspiracy we have not space to deal.

It is sad reading the last words of the old warrior as related in 1 Kings ii.; let us rather turn to 1 Chron. xxviii.; there we see David at his best—not vindictive, bloodthirsty, unpardoning, as the earlier records show him. Let us hope that 1 Chron. xxix. were really the last words of the man who had such an eventful history:—

‘Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as head above all.

‘Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might; and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.’

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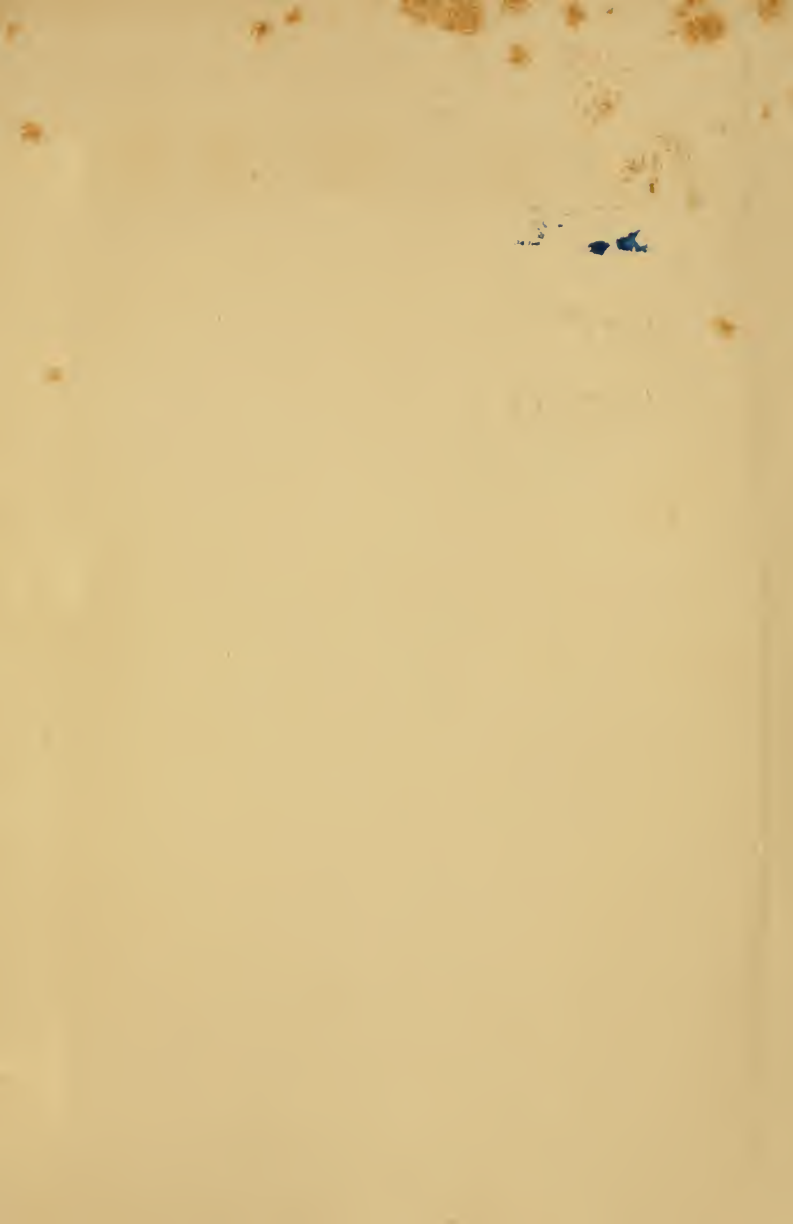
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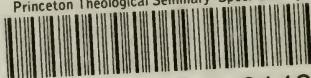
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